

OPTIMOS  
HORACE TRAUBEL











OPTIMOS





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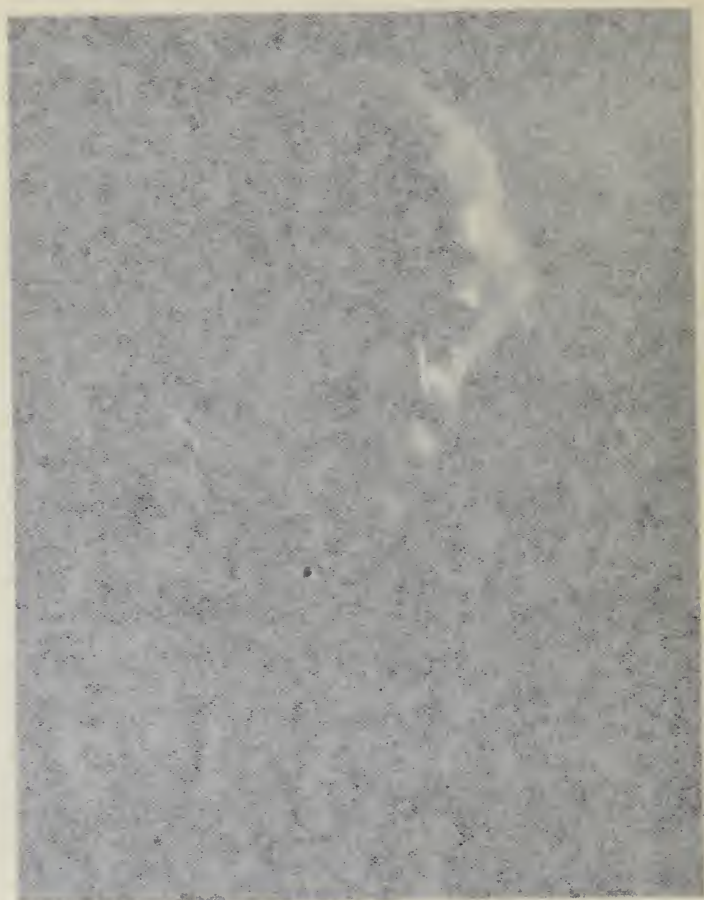
# OPTIMOS

HORACE TRAUBEL

PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARENCE H. WHITE

NEW YORK: 1900

B. W. HUBBSCH



PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARENCE H. WHITE

# OPTIMOS

HORACE TRAUBEL

NEW YORK: 1910  
B. W. HUEBSCH

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## OPTIMOS

**Go** towards the light:

**Ask** no questions—go towards the light.

**The** course is unknown by roads uncut and seas unsailed:

**Enemies** lurk in every shadow (and God):

**There's** the great cause: go towards the light.

The wave that would drown me bears me no ill will,  
It buoys me up and casts me down, it tosses me in its foam and whips  
me into subjection,  
It makes me think little of myself and it makes me think much of  
myself,  
Even as it threatens it sings, even as it strikes it forgives,  
It offends and it regrets, a sunchild it is whimsical,  
It is my whipsnapping master, it is my subject begging to know my  
wish.  
Do you imagine that this wave is the wave you pushed your boat out  
into in the breaking day?  
Rather was it one wave of deep seas inhabiting me, mysteriously each  
day engrossed with reconciling this self which you see with that  
other self which you do not see.

## OPTIMOS

In some faces I meet I see vice rampant and virtue veiled,  
In some faces I meet I see virtue smiling and vice curtailed,  
In vice I know vice, in virtue I know virtue, I stretch the  
boundaries of neither,

I do not stand apart to judge but to witness:

I hold no discourse with fragments, supposing them complete men and women,

To each I accord my whole faith and from each I receive  
in full stream the returning tide.

Is it my call to set men in classes, good, bad, indifferent?

Is it my part to sentence man for one sin or pardon him for  
one virtue?

Is it my part to distrust the tree at its roots because its  
leaves in the fall are dead?

Is it on my palette to color the sun? Can I pour from my  
gardenpot rainfalls and seadrifts?

Back of me are a thousand friendly arms holding me to  
modest judgment,

Before me are as many thousand assurances demanding that  
I give men, women, myself, time for fulfilment.

I have toiled on stony roads, the hot sun overhead, in my  
heart the northern ice,

In the winter's night the snow beat across my face, the north  
winds accused my faith, in my heart the tropic heat,

The word you hear out of my lips is but an emissary,

The word is not me, it but announces me—

The song I hear from the illustrious woman is not the song  
of her heart:

Underneath the song which the audience applauds I hear the  
real song framed in her immortal desires—

The artist painted his picture, it was honorably hung, it  
received the prize of the salon,  
Was the artist here in this paint and canvas? Lo! as I look  
these vanish, a dim beckoning figure appears, I follow.  
I would say, do not let this mystery worry you—  
At its heart this mystery is revelation, in its final solution  
it offers a cup benign,  
If these things I see were all that was to be seen I too would  
seek the roadside and dissolve myself in grief,  
But these things I see are only forerunners, signals, flags,  
standards raised whose significance is yet to be  
known,  
I use them, see them used, as I eat my dinner at noonday,  
joyously, not too much dwelling upon it—  
They are ships to sail me forth, wings for flight, feet for  
marches,  
They are lingerings this side, arrested deeds, hesitated hero-  
isms, shamed fears,  
They have no apologies to offer—they are as truly a part of  
the perfect whole as this is consistent with itself.  
As I look out these windows, as I pass where men crowd,  
where this silent man is alone,  
As I take solace of degradation and bring to lips condemned  
eloquent passwords to the future,  
As I decline to sit on this bench as judge over any man or  
any object,  
As I stand not indifferent to anything nor as a spectator  
looking at something outside myself,  
As cloudbarriers do not distress me—the cloud, my sun its  
creator,  
As I am reborn in every person I meet, every event, every  
starburst,  
As I can be severely arraigned by myself, never by any  
other,

So do I melt all coined gold into earthveins again, render  
all bricks back to claybeds, return all stones to their  
quarries, that men may meet men everywhere without  
interferences—

So, in all the faces I see, maimed, passionbruted, hounded,  
whatever the cursory veils they bear,

All bringing to me my own self again and again, only in  
other dress,

I am recognized, welcomed.

The master workman—when will he come?  
Will he come wearing a collar, on this collar another's name?

The great city was beleaguered, yet its foe was its own self, a heart  
within its heart:

The great city was delivered, yet its walls were taken down, it was  
made open to the world:

Nobody reigned, nobody was afraid, the fruit off the land tasted sweet:  
Men suffered but were not unhappy, death came but these men knew  
the secret of death:

The children lingered longer in the fields, they picked no flowers,  
others with equal title and love were to pass this way:

The farms were not fenced in, the doors were for the wind and rain,  
not for man.

The master workman—when will he come?  
We crouch in the wilds of our black cities, we die of gluttony, we  
die of starvation,  
Yet with one ear listen, listen.

## A GREAT LIGHT WAS PASSED TO ME

I am the stream, I float your ship,  
I am the man at the wheel—I am the stars by which he steers,  
I am the fountain and the drinker;  
Into me, from me, is the drift of every tide.  
The seawaves roll and submerge me and drown me,  
Yet I am not submerged or drowned,  
But, safe and well, singing of life and the ideal,  
With the seastorm present and the helmsman as he shudders,  
Here on your doorstep as you loiter,  
There by your bedside as you sleep and dream,  
Action in me, and the impulse of action in me,  
Touch every hour to love.

Sight is given me beyond sight,  
Did I see only what I see then were seeing death,  
But I see what I do not see, therefore am I alive living or dead.  
If earth is so bad, why do I seek or hope to make it better?  
Earth is not bad—it is not bad or good—it is what it is,  
And I, who am what I am also, pass with good and bad boon years of  
wanton confidence.

Dear soul, my words may be a riddle, but the fact is no riddle at all,  
My father, pursued by his, pursues me, as I, with love and breaking  
heart, pursue my browneyed son dead this year,  
But none are pursued to defeat, all are pursued to victory,  
And I, with one hand backward offered into the shadow and one forward  
also into shadow,  
Though seeing nothing, find both hands grasped in tender recognition.

Wherefore, O you who suffer tyranny and hear the bark of the hounds,  
And you, O wounded spirit, who distrust the crowding fates,  
And you, O dreaming singers, who vision the issues of despair,  
Take back all foul reproach from space and time,  
Recall all doubts, all hasty accusations,  
Recasting in your image the universal love.

## A GREAT LIGHT WAS PASSED TO ME

A great light was passed to me,  
From the infinite before passed to me in trust for the infinite beyond—  
To me, the chosen bearer of the pledges of the past to the fulfilments of the future:  
To me, the humble proud instrument of the eternities for a moment charged to carry the cross:  
The whole of man reaching to the whole of man through me,  
For a mere snatch of time the servant of one age and the master of the next, reaching through me,  
In the great light that surged and swept over my ecstatic soul, reaching through me.

A great light was passed to me:  
It was the mother and father light of the ages reprocreant through my blood,  
It was the husbanding torch of birthdreams kept fed in my goodwill.  
Was I to make too little of the seeddrops of the fathers?  
Was I to turn my eyes away and let the light go out?  
I brushed all obstructions from my doorsill and stepped into the road:  
No matter what hell would say or heaven would say I was off: hurrah, I was off!  
And though so many cried to me I did not turn back,  
And though I was very sorrowful having to leave so many friends behind, I did not turn back,  
And though the ground was rough and I was overtaken by fierce storms, I did not turn back,

And though I was misunderstood and my oldtime companions distrusted me, I did not turn back,  
For when the soul is once started on the soul's journey it can never turn back.

Who are you, any one, who can remain unmoved when the light breaks upon you?

Who can say it does not concern him—who can say it is just as well not to see as to see?

Who can ever be the same child or woman or man again after the day has broken?

Who can admit there is anything else in the world after this has come to the world?

Dear love, you woman or you man, known or unknown, this light has come to the world through you as much as through any other:

Do you not feel it possessing you? do you not feel it visiting you with mad vehemence?

Do you not feel it flowing, crowding, pushing, into every corner of your being?

Is there any nook of you left vacant after its electric flood has swept into you?

Can you now go on with your old life as if nothing had happened?

God! everything has happened in this flash of revelation:

The whole universe has happened,

All of love in all of life has happened,

All your debt to all the past has happened,

All your forgotten kinship to the people has happened,

And the terrible thirst for justice has happened,

And all sad things have happened in gladness at last,

And all things out of place have happened in place at last,

And all old enmity has happened in friendship at last,

And the mistakes of judgment have happened in restitution,

And the uncertainty about the future has happened in certainty,

And the soul is wholly satisfied, for the soul has happened after many burials of the soul.

I do not wait to see where others go, I go on my own account:

I go—in the crowd if the crowd goes, alone if the crowd holds back:

There is much to keep me, there is more to send me on.

Do not get in my way, do not attempt to block my passage:

I must go—for life or death must go, for love or hate:

Out of my way: hands off: damn you, let go!

I do not say farewell—I say: Till tomorrow!

A great light was passed to me.

### THE NIGHTS, THE DAYS, HOLD ME IN THRALL

The nights, the days, hold me in thrall,

Toils of men and women drag my faith to the earth—

Furrowed with pain, the casual cares,

I long—I look—I reach forth to life.

Release! Escape!

Shall I speak of the door swung wide, of the unbarred gates?

After the vigil I step across the borderline,

I take my place with the pioneers.

Have I met the hour patiently, without fear, at the portal?

Now my name is called, now the lip of my love has spoken:

Do I mistake you, O divine Signaler? is it after all some  
other soul that is hailed?

My self is my answer:

There's that in my heart responds, meeting the call with  
equal voice, establishing forever the unspeakable bond!

Bond that does not bind—bond that frees—bond that dis-  
covers and bestows.

Look! I am flushed with inexhaustible possessions!  
The old measures vanish, I am expanded to infinite sweep.

O world! Not dead to you—only seeing you, knowing you,  
at last,  
Mixed with countless worlds, knowing with you your com-  
panions also:

O year! Not dead to you—only seeing you, knowing you,  
at last,  
Mixed with all time, untangling the knotted thread:

O world! O year!—  
Before birth seeing birth, after life seeing life!

The infinite blue, heaven's fond eye, opens upon me.

O voice, mastering me, making me too master—  
My ear is close, I hear the syllables fall,  
Waves on shores of the farther worlds, waves on shores of  
the day.

The clouds part: O face—O face—O face!—  
Face smiling upon me—smiling me wings, buoyant beyond  
the discarded cheapened present.

(You, too, O present, still remaining,  
Duly visiting my heart, not forbidden,  
Yet yielding the place supreme.)

I am all eye—O God! you are all speech:  
Melody celestial—sight and voice, color and tone, warring  
no more,  
In the boundless blue uplifted.

Whose hand touches me?—my brow—my breast—my own  
unasking hand—  
Leading me out of self to self?

Divine form—mother, father—sex only now standing re-  
vealed, the union irreversible:  
Divine form, I made whole in you,  
The elements diverse here blended.

This minute grown infinite, the far worlds spread before  
me,  
The endless drift of soul, the long stretch of faces, all lit by  
the divine sun—  
Or swift or slow or early or late the line not anywhere  
broken,  
All—all—equally sustained, swept in the same destiny, on  
sea and land of life,  
The peak lit for all, the triumph inevitable.

O my soul! look yet again:  
There too are you, a figure in the panorama,  
On your brow the dawn has set its beauteous beam,  
Here with me—there not with me.

Death fills me with its abundance.

What is this flood, overcoming body and sense?

I feel the walls of my skull crack, the barriers part, the sun-flood enter—

Love, lore, not lost, only magnified, floating eternal seas of essence—

Before and behind births and deaths, spiritual gravitation,  
the emergence evermore expanding.

O soul, have I lost you or found you?

Found! the faultless circle born at last to you,  
After the waiting years.

Far eras behind, far eras ahead, the simple few years I finger,

Shafts from the central sun,

Speeding for fuller fruition the orbs of space.

Back to the first word of speech,

On to the last utterance of seers,

My soul, knowing its own, wrapt in its protean habit,  
catches the perfect song.

God! I am circled—I am drunk with the influx of life—

Wheeled in your orbit—given the word I would speak yet  
must withhold—

Leaving you, O my brother, each one, to say it for yourself.

Brothers, worlds, I greet you!

The wheel turns, the boundless prospect opens:

All, all complicate—the light bearing limitlessly the burdens of all.

Do you think that you are missed, that the large heart beats  
not for you?

That somewhere on the road you must faint and die?

Strength will be given for all your need,  
And the weakest, when the night comes which is the day,  
Will greet the king, a giant in stature and grace.

Now the immortal years, the ceaseless round realized—  
The doubts shorn of wing and foot,  
The farthest league nearest, and the multiplied infinities  
choking here in my breast.

O my questioner! you do not suspect me—you suspect your-  
self;  
Tomorrow, seeing yourself, you will see me,  
And the illumined spirit, passing the portal,  
Godgrown, will hail me proudly.

### O ANTERIOR SOUL

O anterior soul! I am emitted of you to the free spaces:  
The light receives me, gravitation receives me, the sea  
wets me with its waves.

I am balanced in the gases, the boiling cauldron swings in  
infinite space,  
I am safe in the fire, I ascend the slopes of flame:  
O sun's self—O nebulous prophecies—O solace of prom-  
ised restoration!

Cool the midnight air—moist the breeze of the morning:  
I sleep, I am resting, I am happy.

An atom of dust in the whirling globe,  
Eager to live, quickened on the wind's passion,  
Floating in sunbeams, thrown into air to fall again,

Potent in rain and light, yielding my life to the desiring  
years.

Open the doors wide!

I am born to new purposes, I turn in the lessening spiral,  
I reach uncertain arms to the love that I attract—to the  
love I solicit:

By the dust am I entered to the new areas of sight.

Robed in flesh, the flesh my house, the flesh's joys my joys,  
Yet never for the flesh, never passing to it my crown,  
Still to the anterior soul retiring at will,  
Refreshment, revivification, recrudescence mine.

I am transmuted ten thousand times,  
I am man, I am beast, I am the soul of the song you  
sing:

I am that by which the orator speaks and the poet writes,  
Seized from countless prior lives for this life,  
On earth's fields won to the new exhibit, the expanded  
powers.

I walk erect, I trade, I am the lawyer in the court,  
I labor with the chaingang, I am sailor and soldier.  
I do not stop to count the years of the journey:  
Why should I stop for that which never stops, for that as to  
which I am unconcerned?

I am discoverer and sceptic, I wrangle and am at peace,  
I am the knowing dreamer and the unknowing mathematician,  
I set forth the new social order, I justify the theorem,  
I lift fact high above reason, its circle is equal with heaven's span,

Socrates and Sancho Panza are the two sides of my demonstration.

On, on, I pass, pausing not with events,  
Little by little the denied is accepted, the darkness is  
lighted, the seeming faithless is made faithful.

Now I am at the human line: dare I still pass?  
Warnings are sent me—father, mother, sister, plead—  
Loved one, most loved one, my other self, tempts me to  
stay, to turn my back to the inviting hills.

There is a figure on the height:  
I see it—O it embraces me!  
It presses a kiss to my lips,  
It sets me sail on immortal seas,  
It vanishes, it comes again, it laves me in the delicious  
stream spread in its unmeasured hands,  
It is day by day my single joy, my overmastering conviction,  
It, figure of light, its forehead to the sun,  
It, the anterior soul, taking me, who am god, back to god,  
Immersing the ubiquitous life in its own waters.

## O TO GRAPPLE WITH SLAVERY

O to grapple with slavery, to shake off obstructions and set  
myself free!

In the midst of tasks exacted by the routine of the day,  
In the revel at night, in the very crown of the dance,  
In the hours of sleep or at daybreak as the first sunbeams  
crept in my window imploring,

Ever arousing me, ever the call renewing,  
The step heard, the brush of aerial garments,  
Ever my first flush strides to the threshold, the rapt gazing  
forth:

Whose voice had called? What was the baffling cry?

I strained my eyes, I threw my ears open—

O coward me, fearing, fearing to close the door behind me,  
suspicious of the herald!

O coward me, creeping back to the comfortable rooms,  
hugging close the fire, again and again embracing,  
pledging, the felicities easiest to my hand!

In me desire to go, in me also desire to stay,  
In me the voice doubted of, the skies threatening,  
In me perpetual struggle, repeated surrender, contempt of  
self.

Days pass and new days come:

O deliverance! O revelation!

I was tried and lost only to be again tried and win,

I had by own act chosen prison walls to freedom,

In the ways unknown I had set my own phantoms to shake  
me from my ardent ideals,

But the call was never abandoned, my instinct was never  
dead.

Well have I treasured the dawn of release,

The melodic prodigal voice appealing, the odors of the  
morning in my nostrils, the haste to challenge the un-  
certain:

Well for my arm that it no longer hesitated:

No more now had I reached the threshold than I closed the  
irrevocable door:

Victory! the soul transported!

The call came near—I stept gravely, loyally, into the genial  
woods:

Had I ever known day before? here was day at last, ten  
thousand suns flooding the vista with light.

Then I knew what it was to be with the universe alone,  
Then I knew what the voice had provided for me,  
Then had I become the near companion of winds and  
streams and ample skies,  
Then had I entered by that voice long distrusted, by that  
figure unveiled now and ever pressing to my side,  
A world immortal.

Now I do not sing songs through leaves of books: I sing  
them chorally with forest leaves and field grasses,  
Now I do not miss in sunbeams the thrift of their inarticu-  
late treasures,  
Now I do not button my coat against the winds: I offer my-  
self to the contact of the winds, they flush me through  
with music,  
Now I do not fear to embark on seas and streams: these are  
now my equal partners divinely serving,  
Now I do not doubt skies and earths, friendliest monitors  
panoplying me with love.

I go by days and nights overswept by native influences,  
I have lost and won, but my loss was least and my victory  
everything,  
For now is my visitor victor, my visitor who was myself,  
My visitor who was wind and river, sea and sky,  
My visitor who ever held me faithful though errant fears  
filled me with treason,  
My visitor compelling the soul to immediate allegiances, to  
native tones setting my obedient will.

O to grapple with slavery, to shake off obstructions and  
set myself free!

## IN THE WESTERN SKY AT THE CLOSE OF DAY

In the western sky at the close of day,  
Over the fading line of the hills, throned in the lapsing  
fires,  
Appeared, O me, O my life's mate,  
In guise unmistakable, in mien commanding and supreme,  
That other me, that other you,  
Subduing the worlds to light.

O sunset god! on your cheek flushing, in your eyes glisten-  
ing,  
The human, making you whole, and the simple wish of a  
man transfiguring you.

Sunset here, O soul! Sunrise over the hills!  
This page is closed, another page is opened,  
By these eyes closed others opened, by these lips silent  
others speaking,  
The morrow regnant and royal in this flickering flame.

Did you say, O my life's mate, that you saw nothing—that  
the space beyond was unfilled?  
Look: do you not see your dream confirmed?  
Listen: is not that the song that your ideal distilled?  
For one minute close your stubborn eyes: you will begin to  
see!  
Again, close your eyes, close them harder: you will see  
much!

At your heart's threshold then the complete treasury offered.

The colors I saw in the sunset faded, other colors appeared,  
And that which to the vision was not plastic, which I could  
    not control,  
To the soul became the liberating flame of life,  
Melting all arts and songs and all mishaps of common hours  
    to a solution.

O solution, my master! O solution, my slave!  
I pour into you life, you pour into me life,  
Till both are full, till the mixture is perfect.  
And I drain the divine draught,  
Sleeping and waking then to new days,  
Heaven's eye upon me, my eye upon heaven,  
Question and answer at last face to face!

### IN THE NIGHT, WANDERING

In the night, wandering,  
In the spaces departed, from affections that would stay me,  
Beyond the sun to other suns, beyond the question settled  
    to new disclosures,  
Not accepting the walls of my house as final, nor the voice  
    I heard in trade,  
At last possessed of sight, after long waiting entering vic-  
    tor to denied estates,  
I, one man, only testifying to the gifts of others, to all duly  
    announced,  
Flushed by the maddening day.

The chemist's retort, surgery's dissecting knife, the scalpel  
    efficient,

The discoverer in arctic snows or tropic heats,  
The sailing ship, the locomotive making continents of one  
name and intention,  
The heated debate, the speculation of philosophy, the rosy  
assurances of reformers,  
Gold, influence, suppressions of conscience:  
These, offering themselves, would-be agents, to farthest  
achievements pledged,  
Accepted, fused, in new fires cast, rejected.

I picked a dried leaf off the ground, and with mournful  
tones others called it dead:  
I knew it was not dead: over the cliff rushed its blood, as  
Niagara from the lakes.

What signs do you make to me, you curling streams and  
simple peasant ways of life?  
What sign, O ocean? What sign, O skyclouds ever shift-  
ing?  
Signs temporal, full of beauty, loved, feeding me as bread  
does not,  
Satisfying me of itself, satisfying me because of its be-  
yond,  
Sign of unmeasured friendly supplication.

The crowd gathers round me, I am a target for protests, I  
stand erect receiving every dart unharmed:  
Warnings, heartgiven, tearstrorn, would deter me from  
resolves commensurate with new worlds to me revealed:  
I can but hold you all in my life, as I am held in yours,  
sympathies universal harvesting,  
Preparing in myself, seeing prepared in you by you,  
Springs, summers, autumns, winters,  
Rounded, of one meaning, never disconsolate or weary.

Upon the painter's canvas, in the song of the poet, in eloquent deeds never yet vocal,  
In faith's quick vision, seeing the cup full, drained, ever refilled,  
In all propositions and all denials, in evil ways traversed by mistaken men,  
Discerned infallibly, the issue ever wholesome, the laws eternal loyal to supreme explications,  
Here spoken, here hinted of, yet again withdrawn until for each the hour of delivery strikes.

The hay allures me this summer afternoon;  
I cross the hills, I linger in odors prodigally spent,  
Yet these are but passports to seasons and fields not in the program of daily uses,  
These are but sparks from fires sunbirthed  
Whose burdened flash steadies the erratic eyesight  
And brings the distant near.

### ROOTED IN QUICKENING SOIL

Rooted in quickening soil,  
Feeling each day the bursting seed, fed and kept alive by earth's interior nourishment,  
Not relying upon any other or expecting any other to rely upon me,  
Knowing man can love man roundly only when love is free and that love is not free when it must sue for recognition,  
I stand content before the careering storm.

I see the failure that often the applauding multitudes call success,

I see the success that is often called failure,  
I see that the seed which comes to nothing, that lies in the  
ground making no sign, is only postponed, not de-  
stroyed,  
I see that what is called good and bad in men must be parts  
of one substance cooperating to a single result,  
Everywhere I look do I see postponements, nowhere I look  
do I see defeats,  
I do not time the clock by what I see but by what I do not  
see,  
If the hands of the clock stopped would my faith be trans-  
fixed and dead?

I put my ear to the ground, I hear a voice—it is the voice  
of the seed children not yet called from their play-  
field:

*There is love that holds us here, it refuses still to yield us to the  
waiting sun, we love our earth mother, she will yet give  
us to a free will, therefore be patient, keep watch for us  
at dawn, the trembling aching soil will be eager to deliver us.*

Give man time to be man,  
Stretch his span till the circle is made.

Do you say that time is up, that the hands of the clock  
have completed their circuit?

See—no sooner is the round complete but it starts with the  
same pace and purpose another:

Tireless is the hand that winds the clock, tireless I who  
wait.

There was a signal sent me from the desert dirt,  
I push my hand in the gutter and draw forth from the black  
mud a red-lipped rose,

O rose: your lips I kiss!

I am observed, good men and good women hurry away from  
the sight of my blasphemy,

They have chosen to press and keep life as a dead leaf be-  
tween the pages of a book,

In odor of earth and damp of cloud vapor I taste life off the  
living green leaf,

My cup poured full.

Was ever man torn up by the roots and rendered dead to the  
wish of the sun?

Why was the way opened and the guest chamber prepared if  
there was to be no guest?

You have as many reasons for being as there have been  
seasons in universal time,

You have as many reasons for continuing to be as there are  
to be seasons in universal time,

You, rooted in quickening soil.

## I AM ON LEAVE OF ABSENCE

I am on leave of absence, I am allowed the sweet furlough,  
Given by consent of life from one life to another,

Crossing all abysses of time and space to arrive on this  
recent globe.

My ancestors sent me out of the world of their peace to  
plead their case with the present.

I can go and stay: but I cannot go where they are not or  
stay where they are not.

They send me as their singer to tell their story of sacrifice,  
They send me as their envoy from immortal nowheres vis-  
iting the secular earth.

I do not waste myself in the gayday of the spendthrift body:  
I test each minute by the hour to which it belongs, and  
each hour by its year.

For a little while I try my feet on the curve of the earth:  
I accustom myself to the strain and struggle of the fierce  
earthchild.

Soon I am to be off again to pass the gage along.

I look forward still to any number of worlds and eras yet to  
be absorbed:

I have brought that for you to examine which you cannot  
reject:

You may reject me, you may refuse the gift from my hands,  
But the gift is yours before and after in all the incidents of  
birth and death.

I shall take to the next and the next the same report in all  
the starry throng,

Playing lackey to no world's no, counting second to no out-  
going tide.

If I could step out of this scheme one step or one second  
what would become of the universe?

It would topple about my ears, wrecked on the shores of  
emptiness and nothing.

I am not free: I am only allowed my pay to spend as I  
choose.

The universe is all around me, I cannot get on its outside,  
I on immortal parole.

## FREEDOM TRANSCENDENT

Freedom transcendent,  
Freedom to go that I may will to stay,

Freedom of seas, yet not sailing seas rudderless,  
Freedom to fly, yet not flying without wings,  
Freedom to walk, yet not walking without feet,  
Obedient to the laws of life, creating such laws myself,  
I am not master or slave: I am in turn creator and creature,  
Divesting myself of age, of youth, without travail.

Not being outwardly compelled to love that I may be inwardly compelled to love,  
Not asking others, or all, to put arms about the cosmos,  
doing it myself,  
Reproaching nothing and no one, driving no bargains with fate,  
Knowing very well that I can give and take nothing to undo  
the balance of the infinite scale.

Freedom would not bind us to God through the church, to  
man through the state,  
It would open the highways of a mutual suffrage,  
It would make of equal parts the immortal compact.

Who of you may suppose that freedom is the city?  
Freedom is but the gateway to the city!  
Who of you deluded yourself with supposing that freedom  
was the song or the singer?  
It is neither: it is the air which invites, receives, invests,  
singer and song!

Was it for freedom that her lovers suffered?  
We did not fight to win and stay on the threshold:  
All battle, thinking, victory, defeat, joy, pain, were keys of  
entrance and exit—  
Having won them, they are ours to use at will: pass signs  
of farther adventure:

Last night I slept well housed, tonight I sleep out under  
the stars.

The winds are the walls of my house, the blue overhead its  
roof, the fluid seas and streams its foundations (founda-  
tions most solid—solideest of all):

I use these to my will, expanding, contracting, employing  
divine laws to the shifting needs of my soul.

Yet do I also live in brick houses and castle walls—

These do not confine me: they are themselves only wind,  
ether, wave, gravitation, for the time stilled to my  
purposes.

When the clock in the hallway strikes all concrete forms  
vanish:

My wand is more potent than Prospero's—I build and dis-  
mantle with unbaffled inerrancy  
Cloud, iron, rock, or tyrant's throne.

Names of states, religions, social ideals, are swept away,  
disappear,

We are merged in supreme consciousness, swept on one  
stream,

We forget men and their differences in remembering man  
and his unity,

We honor all that is called life and all that is called death  
for its undeniable integrity,

There are no dregs in the cup, the full drink is none too  
copious for the drinker.

Freedom never treats with death and delay—its decrees are  
in eternal movement and unhesitating avowal,  
Freedom offers no sacrifices, encourages no conformity,

Freedom is not jealous, its wishing is ever wholesome, out  
of good earth,  
Freedom is reverence, and transmutes good deeds of good  
hearts into thrones and pulpits,  
Freedom offers its parliament to universal membership, it  
disclaims all power to scorn or reject.

Freedom takes from embattling armies their bloodred  
swords—with her tears she washes them clean,  
Freedom takes from legislatures traversing statutes—with  
her wisdom she plucks their sting,  
Freedom treats man to man direct, refusing all interme-  
diaries.

The powers of freedom are the powers of love,  
Freedom is love's equal mate:  
Freedom is wind and star and compass and faithful ship for  
all your hopes.

Freedom trusts: it is not afraid to approach unarmed him  
who is armed,  
In jungle or mob, freedom safely weaves its thread, ascends,  
descends, plays in and out, is never defeated, never  
awed, always defeats, always awes.  
Freedom is faith's crest, it is the arm about the universe, it  
is the hand touching every hand, it is the eye darting  
forth infinite treaties,  
Freedom is that which grants and that which is granted:  
It is giver and gift and the law that operates between them.

Freedom transcendent,  
Withholding nothing, child of divine abandon,  
Affection's spring, melody of poems, odor of roses, sap of  
trees,

Gravitation unstinting—unfailing law of requital,  
 I am bathed in the beams of your sun, I am at ease in the  
     whirl of your tempest, your terms are exact but not  
     exacting,  
 To the disturbed world falls your restoration:  
 The tide is not erratic, the whims of winds pause in their  
     gay rebellion,  
 While you, O Freedom, having the ear of eternal counsel,  
 Persuade all prodigal hearts, atoms, home to their deserted  
     spheres.

### I DO NOT SAY THE SUNSET IS PERFECT

I do not say the sunset is perfect: it is enough—  
 It fills me, I am the flame of its fire, I am its red and gold:  
     my veins dilate in its superlustrous humor.  
 I do not say my friend or my enemy is perfect or imperfect,  
     or that my enemy is not perfect:  
 I know they are enough: I am their life incorporate, I walk  
     in their boots.  
 I do not know what it is to be perfect, I know what it is to be:  
 I do not know perfect or imperfect—I know only life sphered,  
     whole, set everywhere with the eye of the divine.

O house and home of men—O palace of arts and song—  
     fixed there by workmen faithful,  
 Fabric of brick and stone and wood:  
 You, too, are but apparition!  
 I have forecast you in my visits beyond sense and bound-  
     aries, you are a dream manifest to my muscles,  
 Deeper your foundations than the earth they are set in,  
 Loftier your roof-tree than the few feet of space they con-  
     quer:

In heaven and hell securely planted.

We are told to make haste while it is day, for the night soon comes:

I say, do not make haste, it is always day, the night never comes.

Keep your pace only with the years: there is just as much time to be as has been and it will always be so.

Am I my brother's keeper? No—but I am my brother's brother:

We are bridged to the universal purposes, I pass by him, he passes by me, on the infinite ways,  
Sunlit, stareyed, the round accomplished.

There is no foe, there is no friend—

These are but strings of my lyre, these are fair measure,  
from each tones equal and pure,

I touch them conjoined to harmonic song, I raise by them  
the prophecy eternal—

They are my two lips: they are my hands, left and right,  
and by them I am full armed,

If I part them I break myself in two, I throw myself against  
the turning wheel.

Am I mocked with loss and gain?

The winner raises a voice of exultation, the defeated weeps:  
I am undisturbed—I see that both win and both lose,  
I see victor and vanquished each pocketing the booty, each  
paying the bills of conquest.

Had it been dreamed that any one could withdraw from any  
other?

Do not blur the sunbeam: it pierces all hearts: we are all  
in one line.

The scales are dismissed, the unclouded eye sees,  
No longer to weigh, compute, to mark up and down, to  
offer prizes,  
Now only the extended hand impartial, needing no pence  
or acres,  
The hilltop, the valley's bottom, upcast, held down, by  
earth's humor, neither great, neither small, the low-  
land the mountain crest, the pine at the top the daisy  
on the field.

I am risen to my stature,  
That which came out upon the rosebud as dew this morn-  
ing,  
In me, in my opened soul, the sunlight breaking free,  
Illuminates all space.

### DOWN INTO HELL I PASSED

Down into hell I passed:  
I stirred the fires, I saw that innocent and guilty there were  
duly punished:  
I left no soul untouched, I turned ages into the cauldrons:  
I saw that rules were enforced, penalties exacted: that no  
exceptions were allowed:  
I saw the pallid sufferers: and to suffering I added se-  
verity:  
And nothing was too hard for the inexorable humor of my  
revenge:  
Then I turned away and wept: into my secret corner went  
and wept.

In the city I hastened with my whip and drove the crowd  
to sheepfold:

I sat at ease in my study and touched the quick of the thou-  
sand slaves who never saw me yet did my will.

I was master of races, chieftain of tribes, always on top,  
ever commanding,

Obedient to me the social planes rose and fell:

I was relentless, unbending: I pioneered and cleansed:

Yet great was my pity also: I withheld no charter of love.

Into the veins of men I passed: I became their rebel's  
blood, their passion's outrage:

Into their hearts I passed: I pressed life off the line of its  
loyalties:

I halted the flower in its bud and virtue in its impulse,

I performed unwelcome deeds and neglected the call of my  
kinsmen:

Then I turned round my corner again and crowded men  
with the benefaction of my regret.

Out of their courses I swept the protesting stars,

I took the planets away from their bereaved suns:

I touched the earths to deserts: I moled to the roots of  
vegetation and blasted harvests:

I built cities over marshes and played death loose into the  
haughty avenues of the rich,

The sophist, the pander, the outlaw, lodged securely in my  
heart:

Yet my hands were released—they reached behind veils and  
spread wide the crowning conditions of salvation.

But for me God could not have been, but for God I could  
not have been,

In God explained, God is explained in me,

I, the mixed accident and reason, I the straight course and round:

The chord of life not found in God, nor found in me,  
But found in that presence, not God's or mine, strained  
from all being.

You have thought God had quarreled with me and we were  
at war:

But God's truce is mine: our blended pulses yield a single  
pledge.

Did Satan deceive you O my loved companions?

Did you suppose he was really something alone, to be reck-  
oned with as an evil spirit?

Did you believe that Satan was an alien threatening the  
citadel of God?

Did you go to bed at night thinking Satan barred out of  
your house?

Did you think God had so much for you and Satan nothing  
at all?

Did you write Satan out of your scriptures and God there to  
fill every line?

Did you take the round globe seriously and think it was  
intended for gentle things and likely things alone?

Did you take up a spadeful of earth and compare it unfav-  
orably with the colors in your western sky?

I do not parley with Satan or God but with the stuff of the  
ethers which provoke both.

I am no more afraid of Satan's bad than of God's good:

And but for me neither could have been and but for my  
good health the two would never merge:

And the good health of my body and of my soul is the good  
health of the spheres:

And Satan could not damn me alone: God would have  
something to say about that:

And God could not save me alone: Satan would have something to say about that:  
And it is whispered me that I am to be neither saved nor damned anyway,  
But that I am to save or damn myself to all eternity:  
I, in whom God and Satan, for purposes not all seen, eternally melt beyond severance.

## WITH YOUR HAND IN MINE

With your hand in mine, your faith in shadowy retirements of jungled thought,  
The lore of love retrieving the day to its confident dreams,  
You yet rebuke my jubilant cry: *O faithful companion, O my released other self, I am content.*  
You weep bitter tears, you ask: *Can you be happy now?*

The day brings you sorrow, arrogant power has subjugated your will to its will, again I hear your voice: *Is there no pity in your heart for this?*  
The slaves wail, I see the starved outcast, the cold north wind is mad musical at the fireless hearth:  
My neighbor does not say a word yet I hear his question: *O just judge, O passionless laughing optimist, are these in your cup, do you drain these to their dregs, still proclaiming your faith?*

I mix these and more than these in my cup, they do not poison it,  
As I drink I am moved out of my flesh and childborn again to visions unseen by the eye,  
The slave is freed, his chains are wings: the harlot is purified, the passion that sold her restores.

Hark! An hour is struck! do you know the hour? it summons sin from its grave and gives it new form.

Bring all your sorrows, your weepers, here: I will sorrow, weep, with them: I will tell them why I do not mistake the passing shadow for a sunbeam.

The mendicant sits with extended hand by the roadside,  
I accost him: he is blind, deaf, nothing moves him till I  
drop a warm coin in his cold desiring palm,  
This wakes him to life, words vague thankful leap to his  
lips:

*I am blind—yes: but I, too, have skies, seaswells, wonderful  
as any which eyes see—but I also have hunger,  
I am here for my hunger's sake alone, my body's beggary.*

The dark page reads white, the shadows are only playthings  
of sunshine,  
Even failure is successful with success, they reach the goal  
twin-leaping.

I thought I heard as I passed the birds singing in forests  
carols windladen, sunbathed,  
Now I am undeceived: these birds were my heart singing,  
light and breeze the outward theme and song of interior seasons:

The seasound did not come into me, it went out of me, I  
only supposed it there harptouched from unseen musical zephyrs making love to wavecrests,

The blue deep was only starrich by the unhesitating grace  
of my vision,

O apparition! O unsundered worlds! from me first cast,  
out of me created, my heart your sunfires, fused in  
exterior delusions, I surprised baffled by my own  
progeny!

To your beds, O philosophers: sleep yet another night,  
It may chance with the morning, refreshed, you may be better worthy of your inheritance,  
Your now blaspheming lips no longer reluctant ministers of joy.

By specters led I go to the sea's edge, I see the wreckage strewn the shore,

By specters led I reach, I peer over the rim of the volcano,  
By specters led I fearlessly traverse the narrow passes of devastated ambitions,

Before me the processional of sorrow, nothing withheld, no hard line softened, the cruel evil left as evil, inspiration of reformer, tradecoin of priest:

I do not banish these, all are welcome guests,

I had provided enough for all—the seats at the feast are not filled till the last evil has come.

Are all arrived? Well at last for all, for all shall go forth fed, clothed, satisfied.

## THE WORD OF ALL WORDS

The word of all words is the word of the mediator,

The life of all lives is the life mediatorial,

The soul of the continents is the sea that is between,

The substance of earth and the substance of heaven is something that is neither earth nor heaven:

And so may the secular soil and the sacred sky change places, pleading for each other:

And so may doubted things trade with accepted things and the two together proceed upon one pathway:

And so may grief barter with joy, and joy with grief back again, while both draw sustenance from the same source of treasure:

And so by such tokens may the soul partake of the meanings of the body and the body partake of the meanings of the soul.

The dear Christ has been on the cross long enough:  
Come, take him down: release him from his patient travail:  
You may now go up, taking his place, bleeding yourself  
from veins your due to the necessitous world.

The cries of ages chorus the soul to the mount of sacrifice:  
Shall one alone suffer for all? or shall all suffer for one?

There is a fate worse than falls to the man nailed to a cross:  
It is the fate of the man who has no cross.

Here are the slaves who come between and the laborers who  
come between,

Here are mothers and children serving to bridge the perilous  
abysses:

Here are the sick for health's sake and here are well people  
ministering to those who suffer:

Here are ships that go to sea and are not heard of again,

Here are men who die in battle for causes and men who  
kill in battle for causes also,

Here are criminals in whom Judas is as important as Jesus:

Here is a world without absolution and without guilt:

Here is the ebb and flood of atomic genesis making for reparation  
out of the worst dismay:

Here are men who dream, other men who speak prophecies,  
and men truly also who are silent before the sphinx:

Here is the witness of the rain interceding for harvest time  
and the sun turned harvester in the autumn fields:

Here is the drama of interchange—the retrenching seasons,  
the recovered events.

Yet we dare to talk of the Jesus as though he alone had  
passed through the ordeal:

Though I could tell you that the least of the trials of Jesus  
was the trial of the cross.

I should feel ashamed and sorry for my race if only one or  
two of its specimens endured the heat and the cold of  
persecution:

For the road is full of the martyrs who came between and  
made life easier for the rest:

For the sore feet of the weary came between, and the sad  
aches of the condemned came between,

And before the eclipsed martyrdoms all the noisy martyr-  
doms are still:

And thousands of times Jesus has taken the nails out of his  
palms and himself come off his cross protesting,

But you have put him back again and taken perpetual gifts  
and laid them there at his sacred shrine.

In death's name life comes between and in life's name  
death,

And I am humbled seeing how much is made of the little  
things I have done:

For I am not proof against the slanderer when his flatteries  
coin my false metal:

Yet I know that I, too, come between—that I pass among  
men a stream to sunder and join:

Yet I know that where Christs have stood I have stood and  
will often stand again:

Yet I know that I have taken heavier burdens upon hillsides  
and seen heaven off my cross:

Yet I know that Jesus, the Christ, and Buddha, the Christ,  
and Whitman, too, Christ, and the overworked toilers,  
most benign of Christs, have gone with me to treaty  
and trial.

This is what it means to come between: this is what we  
give and take in the exercise of our sacrifice:

This is the meaning of the perpetual ascents and descents  
of saviors:

This is what comes to the heart in solitude after the wreck  
of public preparations:

This is what we see when the Christs abdicate and the  
Christs appear:

This is what honor means to the cross and what it means  
to the workman's bench:

This is what the dreams of men come to when they appear  
in splendor on some mountain top and vanishing  
ignominy in the shadow of some alley:

This is how men and women and children and the animals  
and the stars come between each other pleading the  
case of immortality:

This is the straight and crooked of revelation and mystery,  
crowding to speak the same word:

This is why love ever comes between and reaches out hands  
to either side:

This is why I think the most of the Christs and the least of  
the Christs, I who have also my call to serve:

I, on my knees, dusty, sore: I, up in heaven there, cleansed,  
rejuvenant.

### ALONE IN THE DESERT I STOOD

Alone in the desert I stood,  
Alone in the waste, the blank sands about me,  
Alone with the sky and the outstretched acres of dearth,  
Alone, without dream of a beyond, without wilderness or  
water in sight,  
Alone, with the thirst of the spirit unslaked.

Alone in the city I stood,

Alone in the crowded streets, alone in the superflux of  
plenty,  
Alone where the rest were herded, alone on the hard paves,  
Alone in the halls of the savants, alone in the stress of the  
schools,  
Alone, unfed, hungry from hungers long accumulated,  
Alone, with the rein of my desire unchecked.

O what have I done to isolate me beyond the succor of com-  
panions?  
O what have I done to crowd me into loneliness where men  
convene in assemblies?  
I have offered my bonds and my vouchers, the seal of the  
title I bear,  
I have brought the perfect pedigree of my virtue,  
I have brought treasure and reputation and called them suc-  
cess:  
But all seems alien to the one gift I missed.

What is this break in the line?  
Why do I stand aghast before success?  
Why do I scorn all I have won and only cherish the one  
thing I have not won?  
Is the universe at an end and lost in me? am I the imme-  
diate agent of celestial destruction?  
Is the up and down of life all compassed in the scale of my  
peace and pain?  
What is there at the core of this earth, this heaven, this  
me, to preserve us against our own fires?

Resolutely I searched: with books in my hands: with voy-  
agers ventured:  
And all search was without reward: all reaching forth was  
without fruit:

And only after I stopped searching were my eyes opened:  
Then I found that the worst in me needed to be resolved  
into the better,

I found that the better in me needed to be resolved into the  
best to come, and that best and best again were to  
come forever,

I found that substance was passing into shadow and shadow  
back to substance again, without compromise,

I found that the soul was truly the body and the body was  
truly the soul and that each was the substance of  
neither,

I found that gaps filled up, that breaks mended, that sores  
healed, that everything was bridged and secured:

I found that nothing was left behind—that everything  
passed over,

I found that the soul took care of the last fabric and the  
final word,

I found that everything was the collateral of something else,

I found that nothing was left without its equal on the ex-  
change,

I found that the seed was revived in the tree and that the  
tree passed immortally into the seed again, and that  
this was the formula of being,

I found that the sins and crimes of men were passed in and  
returned good gold,

I found that empty and full meant nothing to life when it  
was left to flow equably in its natural channels,

I found that no treasure could be cheated of its due or could  
overdraw its account,

I found that there was nowhere loss and nowhere gain:  
everything was promptly paid for in full,

I found that no plan could outwit the original scheme:

I found that we ran no accounts with the universe and that  
the universe never worried about its assets:

I found that do what I might my place could not be forfeited,

I found that do what I might nothing could be added to the measure of my station.

The desert is lost in the forest,

The sands are lost in running streams,

The city is lost in the citizen,

The hermit is lost in the hurlyburly,

The scholar is lost in the man,

The brave written words are lost in the braver lived deeds,

I am lost in myself.

## IN THE YOUTH OF MY TURBULENT SPIRIT

In the youth of my turbulent spirit,

In the days when fasting and prayer changed the hue of life and hope,

In days when the priests seemed plausible and I traveled abreast with the scholars of the world:

Then I thought man needed to be saved,

Then I thought I as a superior person was needed to save the world:

So I put on my best clothes and best manners and went out in the crowds,

And raised my supercilious voice above the babel of the world's dissent.

I put canvas before the artist and he painted his great picture,

I put a pen in the hand of the poet and he wrote an immortal song,

I put holy books on pulpits and persuaded from its orators the thunder of their threats,

I sent travelers abroad to fix my seed everywhere in alien  
soil,

I hastened my couriers, who produced from men grave and  
gracious deeds.

Now, I said, the earth, man, will be saved:

Now nothing further needs to be done,

Now I will rest here in the shade while the note accrues.

But man was not saved,

Harvests came and were eaten and man was not saved,

Art celebrated nuptials and feasted upon itself and became  
of age and bore a great name, but man was not saved,

Religion reared temples and went to sleep in them, but  
man was not saved.

And so I had wearily but still with faith to get up and pur-  
sue my journey,

Still with perfect sight the promise forward reading.

Ugly, ill at ease, fretful, distressed and sore,

Driven by counter currents off the direct ascent,

With heart humbled and the deeds of the heart effaced,

All moods of rebellion lost in one mood of humility,

I cast my lot with the outlaw, I went full armed over to the  
foe.

What was the secret?

Out of that resolve grew all the purity of the earth,

Out of that venture was struck all the gold of discovery:

To forswear virtue and to go with those who are the of-  
fenders,

To throw away the leaden vanities: O God! how that re-  
duced the burden!

To mix with sorrow and vice and lose in them the rank  
prides and the cursory blessings:

To take no property with the heart: to go shorn of everything:

To have nothing to give and to desire nothing:

This was the secret:

By this sign was I to get upon good terms with the estranged universe.

Then I saw that the world did not need to be saved:

Then I saw that I needed to be saved:

Then I saw that even I did not need to be saved:

Then I felt the pulse of something which set me down upon a certain spot,

Then I saw all the rest seized and set down upon certain spots,

Then the sun shone on all and merged all in continuity, succession and coherency.

Now the world was new,

Now great deeds were no more and little deeds were no more,

Now an evil humor meant no more harm to man than a good humor,

Now the best man was no better than the worst man,

Now no one was punished for being what he was and no one was rewarded for being what he was not,

Now virtue was no hardier working out its own fortunes than working out the fortunes of evil,

Now law was made meaningless if it became a rule with exceptions,

Now prosperity was surely dead ashes if it did not warm every hearth.

For no word abolished anything but life abolished all words,  
For the savior is not a man nailed to a cross—

The savior is any man or woman who without cross or nail  
lives earth's simple life on the plane of its first propo-  
sitions.

### WHEN THE GREAT ARTIST APPEARED

When the great artist appeared with his miracles I thought  
of the plain facts of my own life and was ashamed:

I showed my back to this wonderful performer and returned  
as one dissatisfied among my fellows:

And the deeds I saw done in these hovels and holes and  
even in the palaces, shrunk to the measure of my un-  
rest and became as ciphers to my calculating dismay:

And even the children were less than children, and the men  
and women less than men and women.

This was worship: this was my reach from the mud to  
heaven: this was to go into the dust and ask of life  
that it pardon me for having lived:

This strange awe before power and skill—this shudder of  
despair, this knave confession and fool regard.

So I too would be artist with the best:

And power visited my veins and stayed with me:

And I took all places other men had taken:

And whose voice but mine was the most admired?

And whose songs but mine were lauded by the schools?

And whose fame but mine was cherished by the academy?

And whose battles were so fought as were my battles?

And whose orations so much as mine stirred men?

And whose rulership was so absolute as mine?

And whose slaves so served a master as mine served me?

And God, seeing all this, meeking his ancient claim, abdi-  
cated and retired:

Leaving to me all realms of worlds—I who could crunch so  
much in my relishing jaws.

Out of me came thunder and lightning and fierce rains and  
currents bearing wrecks,  
And my soul was lost in the din and terror of its own invo-  
cations,  
And the enraged elements so swept the spaces nothing could  
hope to survive their cross purposes,  
All my talents warred against each other, all my prides con-  
tested for priority.  
This was what came in the travail of my passions, when  
power was let loose without love,  
This was the largess of authority, this was the legend and  
entail of the despot.

And what could I do in the dire press of the storm I had  
summoned?  
I had waved my hand and brought this about:  
Would another wave of the hand still it all?  
But with the crisis pale before me my palm would not lift:  
O cloud, O sky, O sun, at last you had your revenge!

The sun came to me out of the sky; the cloud departed  
from my skull: how wonderful!  
I flew to the bosom of my mother self again!  
So the echoing emptiness of my soul was not without inten-  
tion:  
For bye and bye in the hungry rebellion of the retrieving  
spirit the flood came:  
And when the waters rose I had space to receive them,  
And in the bulging fullness of my renewed life the broken  
strands mended, strayed things found their way home,  
and the darkest shadows took in the most light.

Then I went about in accustomed haunts again:  
And unclean things were clean, and common things uncommon,  
And I could not tell the palace from the hut, they were so much alike,  
And I could not tell black from white or criminal from saint, they were so much alike,  
And all gods were so much alike they were transformed into one god,  
And this god and myself were so much alike we too melted as into one frame,  
And the simplest playact of the youngest child was so much like the profoundest speculation of the adept they could not be untangled.

Now all the fancied prizes were cheap and useless:  
Now I gave genius back all its prestige:  
Now I was contented to be alone with love and in the average practice of men:  
I, who had taken my turn on the jovine heights:  
I, who came away leaving all things there where I found them,  
Envyng their masters nothing.

### I REMEMBER

I remember the sensation I felt as I, the farmer's seed,  
dropt in the earth,  
I remember myself as the ship that brought the grain back against the gale,  
I remember what it meant to the acorn as it climbed to the oak, and how I threw myself in humble wish back upon the mercy of the earth again.

A casual word of anger makes me remember my own loose tongue.

When the murderer is hung I remember the murders I have committed.

In the thief I remember my thieving, in the glutton my fatness.

The girl who prowled in shadows of streets for prey—O, I remember her as my haunting prostitution.

In the judge I remember my crime, in the jury I remember my temptation, in the counsel I remember that I too served cruelty for devil's pay.

When I write my pretty phrases I remember my ugly life.

It is a fine coat I wear but what is that which I wear under the coat?

You were tried for all my offenses, and who knows but the real prison is my freedom and the real freedom your barred cell?

I remember myself in the fragments of myself everywhere reflected:

Life everywhere greets me as the friendly rememberer.

Did I fear to see myself where I truly am and as I am truly shaped,

Did I fear to face the reminders of myself in abhorrent forms established,

Then had remembrance annulled the law of life.

### IN THE TREE THE SAP

In the tree the sap, in the earth the bursting seed,

In laughter keynotes of grief, in sorrow veins pulsing with joy,

In the passing the eternal, in the eternal the passing,

Ever in things hearts of things.

In you are lives more than lives of great cities,  
In you are crowding populations asking that you give them  
freedom,  
In you are tragedies every day and gentle love-dreams filling  
the skies with light,  
I reach for them with open heart:  
O they come to me, I am filled!  
And I give you of myself the myriad dream-children gam-  
boling on shores of immortal seas,  
Therefrom we have eaten one feast,  
Therefore is love hastened judgment delayed.

I go from door to door,  
Now I am invited to enter, again I am rejected,  
Now I catch a glimpse through a half opened window,  
Now an imprisoned face greets me, smiles, appeals,  
Now I find an unclosed threshold: O rare threshold!  
But in the main, from mornings to nights, footsore, I go  
unrewarded, knocking at many a lattice, love within  
making no sign,  
Yet never losing heart, never doubting the love of those  
who refuse me,  
Knowing that in the lapse of mortal days—  
Days—O days!—receding and returning waves!—  
All doors, windows, will be freely thrown open, celebrat-  
ing my welcome,  
On every doorsill a lover waiting.

## YOU SEND YOUR WINGED CRAFT OUT

You send your winged craft out on the waters,  
They pass each other, sail east and west, salute, battle to-  
gether, travel against a common enemy,

The buoyant ships your messengers, trafficking with the  
material not of the solid earth,  
Thought laden, heart laden, unnamed, pursuing the silent  
quest.

For what port do they sail? do they come back, empty-  
hulled, apologetic?  
Some of them wreck on farther shores, some return in dis-  
appointment clouded:  
O masters of ships! Do you reckon well of the fleet sent  
out, withdrawn, at your will?

Children ships of the uprisen soul, birthed of deep human  
joys,  
These go their way, stern featured, hardy of rudder and  
hull, stiff of sail,  
Ships armored with a vision, not fearing to assert their will  
or blushing for their mission.

You are launched from the stocks of our labor and love,  
You are the best we can give and send, and are well cared  
for on the unplumeted waters,  
You are equipped for present and future,  
Undestroyed ever, indestructible.

O children ships! I am what you take from me and what  
you bring back to me!  
I am the wavesongs which cling to your wet disabled hulks,  
I am the windjoys making music of your prodigal conquests,  
I am your failure and success, your rapture and devastation.

O eternal shipmaster! O self not doubting self!  
Staunch are your ships, austere your partner sea,  
For wreck or port victory still your own.

## I TRACK UPSTREAM THE SPIRIT'S CALL

I track upstream the spirit's call.  
Far, far I go, past all the seasoned ways,  
Challenging the cautious calendars and towns.  
I track upstream the spirit's call:  
Where it will take me I do not know,  
But my soul sees that all is all right and that we are not  
being deluded,  
And my feet follow my soul, often tardily, but the soul  
keeps on.  
I linger with a last apology, I play with toys,  
I make light of what is off there for what I can here put  
into my palm,  
I delay all farewells until the farewell of departure,  
And finally when leaving shed tears of genuine regret.  
I track upstream the spirit's call,  
Not daring now to disobey my dream.  
I am swept with the living current on and on:  
Into whatever storm I contentedly go, into whatever peace.

## THE GOLDEN AGE IS IN MY HEART TODAY

I have found that love comes forth from customs issuing a challenge.  
And love's challenge turns love loose upon you in vehement plenty,  
And you go to your root and find love there before you,  
And you go to your finished boughs and you find love there already  
arrived,  
And you follow love out of all law and habit,  
And you follow love out of all luxury and laxity,  
And you go where love is free and pure, and you track love to the  
scene of its newday consummations.  
Once you thought love was only safe with the police at its door:  
Now you know that love is only safe when love is not guarded.

Friendship comes from the earth up and from heaven down, where the  
two poles meet in the heart of man,

Friendship prevails where you stop and where I begin and where I  
stop and you begin—where we meet and fade away into another  
presence:

Yet all that friendship promises must be in default until the friend  
appears.

## THE GOLDEN AGE IS IN MY HEART TODAY

The golden age is in my heart today:  
It has cut loose from all the yesterdays and tomorrows and  
allied itself with today:  
It has come out of the poems and pictures and prophecies  
and fixed itself in me:  
The golden age, which you have always looked back some-  
where to see:  
The golden age, which you have always looked forward  
somewhere to see:  
The always postponed defeated vision, retreating with your  
retreat, advancing with your advance:  
The lure of the young, the mockery of the old, the folly of  
noontime:  
The sacred perfect world everywhere nowhere crowded  
with populations that never lived:  
The radiant flawless sundream drawing us all body and  
spirit into its fairy tangle:  
Oh! I who looked for it outside myself in space and time  
and gave up my search—  
Oh! I returning tired to my own flesh to my own spirit  
sank into its eager arms!

You heroes who lived a long while ago and you heroes who  
are to come a long while after me,  
You joys of lovers who are dead and you joys of lovers who  
are unborn,  
You forecasts of seers whose scriptures are a thousand years  
old or are to come in a thousand years,  
You eras of ideals lost and you eras of ideals yet to be won,

You pastures and orchards and pipes of shepherds and social  
plenties that belonged to our first fathers or are to be-  
long to our last children,

You wonders and miracles whatever you are or are to be in  
joy and beauty,

You builders and singers and satisfyers and discoverers who  
lie dead in the arts looking back or looking ahead:

No one knows better than I know what you stood for or are  
to stand for and your measureless worth:

And I say you are not to be made less of by me than by  
others who applaud and reverence you:

And I say more: [I say that I will make more of you and  
make you more real than others ever have done:

For I say that you are not dead in books and on canvases  
and in scrolls of ancient parchment:

For I say that you are alive and more than alive in my heart  
today: all of you, whether vanished or still to appear:

For I say I choke with you—with the amplitudes and ful-  
nesses and majesties of your treasure:

That I do not need to go anywhere to find you in the  
records or forecasts of other people:

That I contain you all—pasts and futures—with something  
invaluable added out of myself:

That thousands of golden ages could not equal in sweetness  
and power that one thing within my own heart—

That sweep of resistless youth that fires my buoyant blood.

I would be the last to make light of my dearer fathers or  
my dearer sons,

But I see no reason why they should make light of me who  
am their son and father,

And while I take my place with what has happened and is  
to happen I also take my place with what is happening  
here now while I too am around,

For though I have gathered harvests I have also planted: I  
sow as well as reap:

And though I am only a simple man with no virtues or gifts  
to speak of I too am well enough off to go into the  
richest company:

And but for me no golden age would ever have been or ever  
could be: for me or something in me:

But for my passionate love, but for my flaming dream, but  
for my imperturbable cheer:

Not because I am different or superior but because I am  
usual and common:

If you take me for a knower you will find that I contain  
nothing,

If you take me for a fool I will surprise you with my wis-  
dom,

If you take me for a saint you will stumble upon me in the  
midst of my sins,

If you take me for a felon you will have to acknowledge my  
nobility,

For the amount of it all is that I am not what you take me  
for but what I am:

For the amount of it all is that the golden age is not what  
you take it for in time but what it comes to in your  
heart.

The golden age comes to new life and love in my heart:

It does not come to money or fame or rulership but to men  
and women and children:

It does not come to anything that the world hears of but to  
something that never asks you to acknowledge it:

It does not come to states or churches or institutions or  
parties of any sort but just to you and to me:

It is invested with untold energies and cant be resisted and  
yet never sets itself upon a throne:

It does not have to go out of its own time or its own people to manifest itself but is immediately victorious:  
The golden age, which once was farthest off, which now is closest by,  
Crowding me with its provocations, lifting me upon its imminent peaks.  
I have read with dimmer eyes the fading tale of a vanquished paradise:  
The faithless priests lose themselves among the stars groping for a miracle:  
I need no miracle: I am too much alive to postpone my exultations:  
The distant impossible things have come next to me with their possible raptures:  
The flower has opened before my eyes so that I can touch and fondle it and smell its perfume:  
That which everybody waits for I bring and they might bring if they got as near to life as to death:  
I do not cry for help into the spent years or against still unopened doors:  
The best comes to pass in me right where I am: the best that has been and the best that is promised:  
The golden age is in my heart today.

### HOW ARE YOU DEAR WORLD THIS MORNING?

*How are you dear world this morning?  
Clean from my bath of sleep,  
Warm from the bosom of my mother star,  
Recharged with the energy of my father self,  
Restored from all derelict hours to the lawful service of time,  
I come without gift or doctrine or tethering humor  
To entertain your fateful will.*

How are you dear world this morning?  
I went to bed last night in the twist and snarl of a problem.  
Have you awakened me to a revelation?  
Has some change come upon the face of the earth and the  
heart of man?  
Was life still busy while my life slept?  
Was something done with the dreams of my sorrow and joy  
to transfigure in man the drag of his daily task?  
Have all the prophets who died unfulfilled and all the plain  
men and women and children who burned or starved  
from injustice come back to earth to partake of a de-  
ferred feast?  
What is it dear world I bring with empty hands to your  
morning?  
What is it dear world you bring with hands as empty to my  
bedside?  
Do the things that were stolen remain stolen?  
Do the lives that were destroyed remain dead?  
Do the stragglers who failed still fail?  
Does the sleeper who slept the sleep of the merchant awake  
only to the merchant?  
Does the law that was yesterday at my throat awake only to  
the law?  
Does the singer awake only to sing, the artist to paint, and  
the orator to talk?  
Or does the merchant awake to the man?  
Or does the law of the state awake to the law of the heart?  
Or do stolen things shift back into right relations?  
Or is the singer silent, or does the artist put aside his  
paints, or has the orator stopt talking, because some-  
thing greater than song or art or eloquence has ap-  
peared in the face of the multitude?  
  
How are you dear world this morning?

We have had confidences other days but somehow the confidences of this day are sweetest of all,

They find me where I am remote, they seek me out where I am reluctant, they confirm me where I am weak,

They melt me down from flaw and angle into purity and circle,

They interpret me to last night's strangers and they introduce me to the real meaning of my vagrant past,

They remove me from my quarrels and they deliver me to truce and peace.

For now I see that when of old I thought of justice and believed I was dreaming that only then was I awake,

For now I see that when of old I thought I hated some people and loved other people I neither hated nor loved but honored all in a spirit superior to hate or love,

For now I see that the wrongdoer is the first to withdraw wrong and is the only one who can withdraw it,

For now I see that all the effort I spent trying to discover why lives were beautiful or ugly has shown me that all ugliness and all beauty finally must lapse in one transfiguration,

For now in the confidences of this morning, in the rapture of this awakening, I find my illimitable roots trailed backward and forward and round into all time and all men,

Pledging my love to countless surrenders and repeals.

How are you dear world this morning?

Was not our love worth last night's sleep?

Was not our love worth this morning's call?

I have left my despairs on the other side of the sun.

A fresher self acknowledging my soul steps forth from all foiled endeavor,

To answer your rigorous cry.

*How are you dear world this morning?  
Clean from my bath of sleep,  
Warm from the bosom of my mother star,  
Recharged with the energy of my father self,  
Restored from all derelict hours to the lawful service of time,  
I come without gift or doctrine or tethering humor  
To entertain your fateful will.*

### I HAVE HAD SUCH JOY ON THE EARTH

I have had such joy on the earth,  
So many of the things that seemed to have started wrong  
have ended right,  
So many of the ecstasies have come out of so many of the  
sorrows of the years,  
So many of the most clouded mornings have so opened the  
way to the most sunny afternoons,  
Evil has everywhere and always so refused to stop with evil  
and has gone on to good,  
Death has everywhere and always so refused to stop with  
death and has gone on to life,  
That I stand happy and satisfied surveying the tangle through  
which I have broken a way.

I know I could argue about the good and the bad and lose  
myself by the way,  
But I choose the other path—I go with belief:  
The world is mine to do with it what I please so I please  
to give it to love,  
And whether I travel down hill or up hill I please to make  
down and up the equal avenues to salvation,  
And whether it is silly or wise I cast my vote for the faith  
I want to be true.

Am I to say that joy only tells of itself in a laugh?  
Am I to say that joy only tells of itself in the full day?  
Am I to say that joy only tells of itself in acts of charity  
and justice?  
Am I to say that joy has no other side of shadow to which  
its light must be evermore referred?  
If I thought joy was only one thing and never another thing,  
If I thought joy could be merry and could not be sad,  
If I thought joy could only be kind and could not be cruel,  
If I thought joy could provide for the heaven and not pro-  
vide for the hell of the earth,  
I would put joy out of my plans and make another guess  
towards God.

I do not feel as if the earth had cheated me,  
I feel as if the earth is bound to keep its contract with me—  
Its contract of death and life, of retreats and advances,  
Its contract of mystery, its contract of revelation,  
Its contract of today and its contract of tomorrow.  
Am I confused by the bloodstream of war and greed?  
I will take war itself and refer it to our contract and give it  
to joy,  
I will take greed itself and refer it to our contract and give  
it to joy,  
And the man half done in barbarism to man will finish in  
conciliation to man.

Joy is my boon companion, it goes where I go,  
In grief joy is still joy, in defeat joy is still joy,  
It rainbows my tears, it ladders me up impossible ascents,  
It nestles itself at my root and cares for me like rain and  
heat,  
It flies its free way through spaces and sings like a bird in  
my tree,

Joy is my boon companion, it goes where I go.

I am a singer of joy to the earth,  
I am going to take joy to the ends of the earth,  
I am going to give joy to you, to you, to you,  
Whether you ask for it or not, give joy,  
Whether you reach both arms out for it or turn your back,  
    give joy,  
I am going to take a joy to every sorrow in the world,  
I am going to take a joy to the perpetrator and to the vic-  
    tim of every wrong,  
I am going to take a joy to every doubt of joy the earth  
    across.

Whether rejected or looked for I will be on hand with joy,  
For I who have had such joy on the earth  
Have nothing to do but to give joy back again to men—  
Being so full and run over with joy, give joy back,  
Being so convinced of beauty and grace, give joy back.  
Joy flows out of me because nothing could keep it in—  
It breaks out of my eyes and lips and the shake of my hand,  
It is resistless, it is inevitable, it claims the biggest place,  
Fulfilling in the nearest life the farthest ideal.  
Shall I stand aloof and say nothing and look black?  
All that was otherwise lost I will win:  
Other men have come to fulfil and have been fulfilled—  
Why should I too not come to fulfil and be fulfilled?  
I who have had such joy on the earth?

## I DO NOT ASK THINGS TO GO MY WAY

I do not ask things to go my way: I go my way myself:  
I do not growl when the fates seem against me:  
Why should I care as long as I am not against myself?

I hear you speak of your star and point to the skies in the night:

I, too, speak of my star, but my star is myself and shines in my own soul.

You say that everything is going the other way: you know it: you have seen it with your own eyes:

But how can everything be going the other way so long as I keep on going this way?

I would be afraid of the earth if I was at odds with myself: But when I am on good terms with myself anything may go wrong, I will not go wrong:

I could not tell you how more than ever right I shall be then in the stern hour of my reverses.

I say to the winds: it's no use: blow however strong I stand however steady:

I say to the fires: burn however fiercely I fan an intenser counter flame:

I say to the mob: howl however loud I shall defy you in a louder voice:

I say to death: fall round me in whatever blackness I will make my sunbeam bright enough to break through you in glory.

Do not tremble, O my brother—the world is all right if you are all right:

I am not cheating you with promises that cannot be kept—

I know my way: in the deepest confusion know my way best.

I have not been alone with myself for so long for nothing, I have not taken counsel of my own soul all these years for nothing:

There must have been a good reason for the preparations and the delays,

There must have been a good reason for the miseries I suffered.

Now they are all gone and I am of all men the happiest  
man,

And now I see that happiness was the good reason and that  
the good reason eternally prevails.

I do not think there is anything finer than to know how  
good your friends are to you—

Nothing finer except perhaps this, to know how good you  
may be to yourself:

I love the thought of my friends and I love the thought of  
myself,

But sometimes I have to say goodbye to my friends while  
I never have to say goodbye to myself:

And so it is with you, my brother, dear brother, just as it  
is with me:

I come and go but you to yourself forever faithfully remain.  
It may be very foolish to be so well satisfied with your own  
soul—

It may be like following a light leading you nowhere,  
It may be like being in a boat going to sea without a rudder,  
It may be like drawing a check on a bank that does not exist:  
It may be all that is foolish and more than foolish:

But somehow I am ever so well satisfied with my own  
soul—ever so well:

Am never so well satisfied as when all things seem to be  
going against me,

Am never so well satisfied as when the last hope is forfeited  
and the light seems getting ready to go out

My friends all tell me I am a fool,

My pocket book tells me I am a fool,

The great fame I might have won tells me I am a fool,

And if that is the only way a man has of knowing himself  
the question would be settled.

But I stand aside for all who say so much and say nothing  
myself,

And until I tell myself I am a fool I guess I must continue  
to travel my wise own way.

I know that things do not go the way of the man who does  
not go the way of things:

I do not ask things to go my way.

### WHY DO I FEEL SO GOOD?

Why do I feel so good this morning?

What is there in the air I breathe that makes it seem different  
from the air of other days?

Why is it that the one usual sun shines with the light of  
twenty suns?

Why is it that I offer my hand to everybody and offer my  
love without reserve to everyone I meet?

Why is it that things have larger meanings than yesterday?  
Something has happened with the night and the day that  
transcends the night and the day.

The farthest glory of the universe has distilled itself into  
the nearest life.

I find myself repeating a strange alphabet and spelling  
beautiful words

Why do I feel so good this morning?

I do not know to tell you: do you know to tell me?

I can never tell the why of my fuller life,

But I know it has a why and I know it need not be told:

I know that joy comes to me without reason and makes  
itself at home in my heart,

Explaining the shadow of imperfection in the rapture of  
the perfect,

Completing the circuit of my cosmic prayer.

This is the hour of pardon and of requital,

This hour of the morning coming no one knows how,  
This hour that can give no account of itself in traditions of  
    heaven or hell,  
This hour that comes without debt or the treasure to pay  
    debt,  
This irresponsible hour, this glad hour of careless excess,  
This hour of the repeal of law, this hour of the negation of  
    precept,  
Given to me without terms in abandon of forthright joy,  
Mine, mine, to be henceforth riotous in my blood forever.

Why do I feel so good this morning?  
I think God has written a new will and made me his heir,  
(Brother, you may feel as I do, and become yourself, too,  
    that only heir),  
I think heaven has been adjourned to reassemble itself in  
    the paradise of my personal heart,  
(Brother, you may feel as I do, and heaven will adjourn  
    itself for you as it has for me),  
I think the natural laws have taken some time off and left  
    me to run things for a while myself,  
(Brother, you may feel as I do, and the natural laws will  
    stand aside for you as they do for me),  
I think I never felt myself so much smaller than my small-  
    est brother and so much bigger than my biggest brother,  
(Brother, you may feel as I do, and you too will then see  
    that there is no man great and no man inferior but that  
    love floats all alike on the level of the same stream),  
I think the sky above me is mysterious as it never has been  
    mysterious before, and clearer as it has never been clear  
    before,  
(Brother, you may feel as I do, and the mystery and the  
    confession of the sky will be to you as they have been  
    to me).

Why do I feel so good this morning, dear brother?  
I seem capable of justice, I seem equal to love.  
Yet the morning says nothing to me, speaks me no words,  
and nothing out of the way has happened.  
Yet I feel so good this morning:  
I may be deceived, I may be lured to destruction,  
Yet I feel so good, I feel so good.

### COME UP WHERE YOU BELONG

A voice descended to me from a great height,  
A voice of fierce command, a voice of tender appeal,  
A familiar voice, a voice I was bound to recognize—  
Ah yes, my own voice, my own voice, descending from the  
great height,  
My own voice hailing me and crying in accents of fate to  
me:  
*Come up where you belong! come up where you belong!*

And so I listened and was told the plain truth about myself.  
Why do I stand back as if I was of no account?  
Why do I give room for the trees to grow and refuse to take  
room for my soul to grow?  
Why am I afraid of love and afraid to let love grow?  
Why am I afraid of justice and afraid to let justice grow?  
Why am I afraid of the heart and afraid to let the heart  
grow?  
Why do I stay down here afraid when I should be way up  
there without a fear?  
Why am I afraid to write the right songs and afraid to let  
the right songs grow?  
Why am I afraid to paint the right pictures and afraid to let  
the right pictures grow?

I hear the voice cry to my picture: *Come up where you belong !*  
I hear the voice cry to my art however it dallies: *Come up  
where you belong !*

I have stayed—I have stayed—and now the voice is imperative:

When I have done the worst my voice is still imperative for the best.

The Lord your self is there and calls: *Come up where you belong !*

And though you do not hear the Lord your self still calls,  
And though you hear and do not go the Lord your self still calls,

And what you cannot do unaided you can do when you help your self.

The biggest things always take you up and up—

The biggest you always cries to the smallest you: *Come up  
where you belong !*

And when your art stands back cries,  
And when your daily work stands back cries,  
And when your book stands back cries,  
And when anything you do stands back cries,  
For no one and nothing is finally to be deserted below the highest plane,

And one time or other everything rises to the level of the eternal call:

*Come up where you belong ! come up where you belong !*

Rises to the level of the eternal call.

I see your soul on the great crest of its faith standing ready to receive you:

The way up may seem hard and hopeless but there is a way and you will climb:

I do not expect you to make excuses and stay where you are,  
I expect you to cry to your soul's cry the immortal here!

Oh God! I am persuaded! I depart! I go at last to my soul!  
I cut the chains that bind—I demand to be free, to be free!  
The last income I cut, the last success I cut, the last song  
and picture I cut,

I go where I hear the voice, my voice, that calls me up!  
I emerge from the difficult tangles of service to the clear  
worship of the steep beyond:

Nothing can hold me back—the soul calls in my own voice:  
Dare I say no to my own voice from the giddy ascent?

I go without burdens, I tear myself loose from the bribes of  
the causeway—

Nothing can now delay my passage, nothing can now come  
between me and my soul:

My soul up there belongs to me—I will have it—I will possess  
its last eminence:

O soul do you not hear me? Hello soul! I come! I come!  
You will not need to wait much longer to embrace me—  
I am on the way—my eyes look up, up, into your affirming  
face—

I hear your cry and I am on the way to make it good O  
my soul!

*Come up where you belong ! come up where you belong !*

## LET ME BE CHEERFUL FOR YOU ALL

Let me be cheerful for you all: cheerful, forever cheerful,  
for you all:

Even when the malign seems to happen instead of the merciful,  
let me be cheerful for you all:

Let me bring the sunshine to you who are in darkness: to  
all of you:

Let me bring dancing and joy to you who are in despair: to  
all of you:

I will lift you up out of danger with my laugh: all of you—  
all of you:

I will put my arm under you whether you deserve it or not  
and charge you with farther faith,

I will be like another earth for you to stand on and be  
sure of,

I will be like another sky for other suns to shine out of  
upon your head,

I will smilingly cushion your hurts and stir your last hope  
to discovery with my hurrahs:

I will not be reasonable or show sense but I will be cheer-  
ful:

I will not be afraid to face the music: I will face it though  
there's death in it with cheer:

For it is my business being so extra much alive to be cheer-  
ful: to be cheerful for all,

As it would equally be my business if I was extra much  
dead to die if I could no longer be cheerful—cheerful  
for all.

Being cheerful for all does not mean not to suffer—not to  
lose:

It does not mean not knowing enough to know pain: it  
means knowing too much to know pain:

I, too, have gone as far down as anybody into hell: I have  
not asked to be spared:

How otherwise would I be able to take you so far up up  
into heaven?

Do you think that because you see me going about looking  
so well satisfied with things that I am heartless?

Why, it is my heart that makes me gay and sufficient—that  
steadies and saves me:

My heart goes freely everywhere and brings me back beau-  
tiful reports of men:

Brings me back witnesses, lovers, those who work for others, crowding me with divine guests:

My heart going where nothing else of me could go and bringing me back that which nothing else of me could bring.

You do not see me when I am sorry for myself—when I, too, go into my closet with my own soul:

You do not see me when I am driven here and there in the night wondering whether love is in the end worth its keep:

And yet I pass only by the usual route to joy—I go only by the common path to cheer:

There could be no yes where there is no no to provoke it: no vision where there is no blindness:

I am not cheerful because I suffer less but because I suffer more than you suffer:

I enter upon my cheer through the gate of grief for I know what is within.

When you see a little you die but when you see more you live:

And so as we journey together I will be cheerful for you when you cant be cheerful for yourself,

And I will pick up my brothers who have fallen not with my hands but with my cheer,

And I will revive my brothers who have succumbed to adversity not with cash out of a bank but with cheer out of my red blood:

For my cheer will go where no touch of the body can go, where no gold of realms can go:

And you who once alien become at home among men and stars must acknowledge and hail me.

Let me say something more, dear comrades, you men and women and children the world over:

I am not cheerful for you all because I am alone necessary  
to you: that would put my price too high:

I am cheerful for you all because you are also necessary to  
me: that fixes the just value upon my place:

I am not above you or below you but in the midst of you  
keeping my appointments:

I merely give back in a small way to you that which you  
have lavished upon me till I choke with plenty.

You do not perhaps know what that is—what it all issues  
from and goes towards,

But I know it all comes from you—that but for you it  
would not exist and I as I am would not exist,

And so I am richly cheerful for you all without being  
cheaply important for myself,

And I am better than armies and markets to you when  
treachery has balked your trust,

And I have no more right to be down in the mouth than to  
put out the sun,

For I must always make it clear to the countless numbers  
that wait for me that I also wait for them,

And that cheer is due other men from me: whatever they  
come to me with, is due to them,

And that anything less than cheer would be so much less  
than life and so much amounting to murder,

And that I for my part whatever you do owe the crowd my  
succoring trumpet cry—

Though there is no way to explain it, owe the crowd the  
first word and last word of illumination.

You who must mourn, mourn—cry your fill: lament:

You who have lost all have not lost me: take what comfort  
you can of me:

I will be cheerful for you all: nothing can occur to confute  
my cheer:

Go round if you must bent sad bereaved: give your years up  
to your days:  
I do not ask you to gambol with me in this frolic of my  
inimitable feet:  
I will be cheerful enough to rejoice for all: I will add cheer  
to cheer till my total is adequate for all and beyond:  
And so now you know why I am seen everywhere strong  
insolent erect and happy,  
And you know why I slap every funeral on the back and  
startle it laughing out of its formulas and mockeries  
and blasphemies,  
And you know why no argument could dispose of me be-  
cause I am not reasonable and why no argument could  
start where I start from and follow me to my results,  
And that is why you will let me be cheerful for you all:  
cheerful, forever cheerful, for you all.

## WHEN I GO ROUND HOLDING MY HEAD UP

When I go round holding my head up,  
When I put on a look as if I was expecting unprecedented  
blessedness for myself,  
When I take with joy that which comes wept over and  
complained about,  
When I make so much less than loss of loss and so much  
more than gain of gain,  
When the people stop gazing at their leaders and teachers  
and gaze at me,  
When the sun dont seem so much brighter than everything  
else after all but something in my face seems brighter  
than the sun,  
It is not that I am cynical or proud or want to lord it over  
anybody—

No, it is not that, it is everyway different from that, dear comrades:

It is only that I see luckier days for the people beyond their despairs,

It is only that I can smile for knowing the good fortune in store for man.

No one will ever know me for a prophet of evil—

I am able to see what is bad but I am able to prophesy only what is noble.

It dont seem to me I could look any man in the eye and predict disaster for him:

He may be very imperfect but he is better than the law that would let him fail.

My first call and my last call is the call of succor:

I would feel guilty enough if I had to say to any man: I can do nothing for you.

Do you think the universe would dare to say it could do nothing for you?

Try to think what that would mean—try to measure the fearful confession:

Take the stars out of the heavens—it would mean more than that,

Take justice out of the dreams of man—it would mean more than that,

Take love out of the flesh and soul of man and woman—it would mean more than that.

Do nothing for him? I can do everything for him.

Come to me, I will speak the last word, I will restore you. I am nobody—I have no great name to invoke in your behalf:

I am only myself—I can only speak in my own name and let it go at that.

Yet I am very haughty, too: I am not willing to talk in a  
poor way about my rich soul:

I want it to be clear how much I honor my inheritance:

I am not blind to the glory of the light that bursts from me,  
I am stunned by the beauty of the song that leaps from my  
heart,

I see that greater than any love so far my love will include  
exclusion and call the exiles home.

That is the reason I go round holding my head up:

If I felt mean about the earth I would call on God for an  
apology,

If I felt mean because men go wrong I would feel just as  
mean because they go right,

And if I felt mean about the issue of life I would feel too  
mean to be alive,

For nothing saves you or saves me but our respect for you  
and for me—

No matter what the critics and the despondents may say,  
our respect for you and for me:

And so I challenge all the grief of life and death by all the  
gladness of life and death,

And I challenge all the sickness of the flesh by all the  
health of the flesh,

And I challenge all the greed of the world by all the gen-  
erosity of the world,

And I challenge hell by heaven, and treason by loyalty, and  
see them subserve a compensating scheme,

And I challenge the fear of the shadow by the lure of the  
light,

And I challenge the brightness of the day by the radiance of  
the spirit,

And I challenge every question of dismay by every answer  
of hope—

Not caring what reasons and evidences may seem to say,  
challenging them by what impulse and vision may be  
known to say:

And so I go everywhere among men championing the dear  
purpose of the stars.

I do not undertake to explain the strange power that en-  
thralls me:

I do not see how my passion comes but I see what it comes  
to,

Nor my love: I do not see how my love comes but I see  
what it comes to,

Nor can I tell how my dark or light diminishes or increases  
the splendor of the day but I do not scoff,

Nor why men stop as I pass and ask each other who I am  
but I know they feel better about their troubles after  
they have seen me.

That is what I have to say when I go round holding my  
head up.

## WHY SHOULDN'T I BE STUCK ON MYSELF?

Why shouldn't I be stuck on myself?

I do not pass on my way by anybody's leave:

I am sent by the universe to do the errands of infinity:

I am the delegate of all the powers standing for the cosmic  
intentions:

Look at me: see in me the envoy of Jupiter and Mars: read  
my credentials:

I am not a child of children born out of the ground to the  
ends of the ground—

I am a god of gods born out of the heavens to the ends of  
the spirit:

I am the carrier of worlds to worlds across the abysms of  
skies:

I do not discredit my office: I dare not cheapen the glory of  
my mission:

High as the ascents of space, higher I fly:

Deep as the roots of being, deeper I dig:

Strange as the mysteries of time, stranger I am:

Lovely as the beauty of things or souls, lovelier I seem.

I could not think well of you, dear comrade, unless I first  
thought well of myself,

Or think joy of you unless I thought joy of myself,

Or think justice of you unless I thought justice of myself,

Or think reverence of God unless I thought reverence of  
myself,

For out of the making of myself proceeds the making of  
worlds:

Therefore I say that I could not afford to think poorly of  
myself I who think so richly of the rest—

Therefore I say that I have taken God to be my brother not  
my king—

Therefore I say that this comrade universe is for all, God  
and all men and women and children equals of God,  
share and share alike.

I who can say such sure things of the flower seeing only the  
seed,

Or of the unfathomable ocean seeing only the tides and the  
water,

Or of the vast mountains seeing only the pines and the rocks,

Or of the sunrises and sunsets seeing only the colors and the  
cloud forms,

Or of the tomorrows of time seeing only the yesterdays and  
the todays:

I who can say such sure things of all else could have no reason for impeaching my own birthhold—

I, too, may make daring uncompromising claims for my sacred foundations,

Not being ready to stand aside for appearances doubting my right to my size.

I acknowledge you, you powers over my head, you powers under my feet,

But though I cheerfully countersign your warrant with my full name,

I reserve the supreme endorsements—for my body and my body's soul reserve them without forfeit.

I dont think I could say how great I think everything is—  
How great the little is, how great the forgotten is:

And the bad, which hurts and maims me—how great corruption is,

And obscurity and death—how great with eminence not being known is and how great with life the farewells of life are,

And the delays and refusals—how great postponements and negations must be,

And the barbarisms and crimes—how great with reconciliation and restitution they appear,

And, no matter what, anything going wrong—how great with going right it inevitably becomes:

I let myself go, I regard myself with an indulgent eye, I am at ease about my greatness—

I dont think I could explain how competent I know myself to be and every one is in the roster of the constellations.

I reckon liberally upon what my eyes see and my ears hear:  
I do not cut my measure short or pare my fate too thin:

Even the universe—is it big enough to hold me?

The stock universe does not fit me—the cut and dried universe is out of shape.

Take away your ready made stars, your ready made deities and people:

I must have a universe made to order so it is roomy enough and noble enough to be comfortable in.

I have no gospel to preach: I just walk around and let my spirit loose in the crowd:

I who can conceive of such limitless energy for the universe can conceive of just as limitless potentiality for my own body and my own dreams:

I who can admit no pause in the universe can admit no pause in myself:

Why shouldn't I be stuck on myself?

## THERE DONT SEEM TO BE ANY REASON FOR IT

There dont seem to be any reason for it:

My joy comes and goes and comes again somehow without reason:

My love possesses me in perpetual flood—I dont know why: it sweeps me out into its stream:

And I go on whatever reverse may come to me—go on in gladness,

And though I might sit down and cry and give in, something not easy to account for nerves me against surrender.

The man of science says I could tell how it comes if it was true,

And the lawyers say so too, and the professors, and the experts:

And even the eager everyday man who cannot see for himself wants my reasons,

And he too goes away disappointed when I tell him I make no demonstrations.

The beautiful mystery seems too sacred to be bandied about in definitions:

It is deeper than the deepest seas—there is no bottom to it:

It is higher than the highest hills—there is no top to its ascent:

It is wider than all the diameters of all the worlds—it never finishes its journey across:

It is more imposing than the passwords of martyrs and prophets—it acknowledges the people in their heroic obscurity.

Why should I make light of it simply because I cannot set it forth in a statement?

It never turns against me—whatever I do never turns against me:

No matter how uncertain my flame it is steadfast and inevitable,

No matter how far wrong I may go it never fails to go right,

No matter how I fall, and for whatever wilful cause, it still stands erect.

I do not say I deserve it and it never asks whether I deserve anything—

Though I sin the worst sin it keeps within reach the best blessing,

Though I am treacherous to the day it keeps the years forever loyal.

Maybe if you did not make so much fuss about understanding me you would feel me better,

And maybe feeling me better is better than understanding me only half enough,

And maybe the inspirations that take us farthest say the  
least about themselves,

And maybe the desires that are so delicate they would break  
if trusted to the gentlest phrases—

Maybe these desires are the staunchest bridgeways between  
the heights.

I do not say I know and I do not say you should acknowl-  
edge me,

I do not say I have a message or a gospel for you to take  
and swear to—

I do not so much say things for you as for myself,

And what I say for myself is only that I live in contact with  
realities,

And what I say for myself is that no alien witness can dis-  
prove me.

I am bound hand and foot to the evangel of my sufficing joy,  
I am freed body and soul to the impetus of the celestial  
ministrant.

Think what it means: to be ready with generosity for any  
greed,

Think what it means: to be ready with joy for any sorrow,

Think what it means: to be ready with life for any death.

Though reasons and figures fall short the account of revela-  
tion never falls short,

And though no logic lights the way my unceasing rapture  
lights the way,

And though the seed cannot tell how it passes on it arrives  
in the flower,

And though the song fears the tongue of contention it  
hurries to the lips of the singer.

So I keep to the road not wondering when I am mocked by  
the schoolmen:

I can only say that I do not know—that I only live,

I can only say that I have no diploma but that I have much  
love,  
I can only say that I am new heart to the forsaken, who do  
not ask my name,  
I can only say that I advance with the pioneers and send  
back glowing reports to my comrades whose start has  
been delayed—  
I can only throw out these reminders, tenderly, not attempt-  
ing to argue,  
Admitting that there dont seem to be any reason for it.

## I'LL NOT SAY HARD THINGS ABOUT YOU, DEAR WORLD

I'll not say hard things about you, dear world:  
In my sorest resentments, in my saddest reverses, I'll not  
say hard things:  
I'll allow you your incompleteness and give you time to be-  
come complete,  
And allow for the imperfections of men and give them time  
to become perfect,  
And refuse to make too much of your cruel contradictions  
that I may not understand,  
And criticise you and rant about you and scorn you and  
swear I am through with you:  
All that and more, dear world: I'll spare nothing, I'll hold  
back no rebuke:  
And when you are accused I'll not defend you: I'll let you  
suffer and listen to your sentence:  
For I dont hold a brief for you, dear world: I'm not in  
your pay—I dont have to coddle you:  
I see too well how beautiful you are and how ugly you are—  
how fair you are and how foul you are:

And so I let the worst be said about you and even acknowl-  
edge the worst,  
And I stand aside while others have the floor to tell you to  
your face what you are like,  
Waiting till the last word of contempt or doubt is spoken  
before I break in,  
And only then breaking in on my disappointed and sorrow-  
ful brothers in a quiet mild way,  
Not so much wishing to pat you on the back or crown you  
as just to move near to you,  
Not so much ready to greet you with phrases in loud ac-  
clamation as just to move closer, closer to you and be  
silent.

The people are gathered together: I hear their quarreling  
voices: they are asking questions of each other:  
The people: your people, dear world: my people: asking  
questions of each other and of you:  
The profaned maltreated people, the robbed subjugated peo-  
ple, thronging to you, defying you:  
With guns in their hands, with daybreak in their brains,  
with hating loving faith in their hearts, challenging  
your replies:  
All of them—the few half overfed, the many half starving  
—pushing pressing to your door demanding an audi-  
ence:  
Unwilling longer to be sent away ungratified, resolving now  
to get in if they have to break in,  
Wanting to know why things are so and so, why your  
storms mow them down like a harvest,  
Wanting to know why you drive their girls to the streets  
and their boys to the scaffold,  
Wanting to know why you draw lines across the earth for  
two sorts of people when they are all your children:

Wanting to know: aroused and threatening: thinking it no more than right for you to be honest with them:

With them, the people, your own flesh and blood, patiently strong, coming to you with their chains on:

With them, the people, lifting up their manacles and asking you what they mean:

Thunderously noisy, ominously silent, talking out, saying nothing, looking expectantly at you:

I for myself, hearing it all, taking a part in it, too: raising my weaponless menacing hands with theirs:

To you, dear world, giving you no rest, never stilled, multitudinously surging in upon you the same as the sea:

I hear and see it all, dear world: I'm a part of it all, dear world: and so I set it down blackly without a bit of the shadow cut off.

Yes, I see and hear it all, dear world, and am convinced by it all,

But I don't come to conclusions: I stand to one side while the crowd are groping for their conclusions:

And strange visions visit me: come to me not from on high or by a mysterious revelation:

Come to me out of the lives and sufferings of those who complain, out of the nobility of those who are wronged:

Come to me out of the common fund of everyday behavior bringing me riches and comfort:

Come to me deliriously binding out of the loves of men and women lawful or free:

Come to me thrilling my body, come to me uplifting my soul,

Saying strangely that for you which you could not say for yourself,

Clearing up contradictions, mercifully tempering edges that are cruel, in your sufficing name:

You, dear world, who can say nothing in defense—who can only be arraigned and convicted:

You, dear world, who are helpless till we help you, who can only sing in our songs:

You, dear world, who are not against us as long as we are for you: no—not as long as we are for you:

You, dear world, who, for all your faults, are my one chum of all the stars in space:

You, dear world, who gather me to your nearby flesh, who draw me to your farther spirit:

Yes, I see and hear it all, dear world, and admit it all, yet nestle closer closer to you and am silent.

I sympathize with you, dear world: I know what it must mean to you: yes, I know:

To have to be so dead still in confession when you are so stirringly alive with proofs,

To have to take all that is said to you with composure without retort or making a sign,

To have to seem to be guilty and cruel when you know yourself to be innocent and kind,

To have your children abandon you and be unable to open your mouth:

Oh! I know the mad horror of that: I go through it with you, dear world:

We go through it understanding each other, dear world, you with me, in the dark hours, together:

And though you can say nothing I can say much and will raise my protesting cry:

Standing speaking for you in my own name: till everybody may hear and see, standing speaking for you: defiantly contending for you:

Where you give yourself no meanings I giving you meanings proudly enough,

Where others give you false meanings I giving you true meanings in return:

You can rely upon me, dear world: I giving you meanings large enough and loving enough to account for all disaster:

I'll not say hard things about you, dear world.

### WHEN I CROSS THE RIVER IN THE MORNING

When I cross the river in the morning,  
Seeing the tugs and steamships go up and down,  
Watching the schooners loaded with coal starting for a voyage north or south along the coast,  
With all the little boats darting pushing everywhere to and fro,  
I feel happier about myself, taking counsel of the life I observe,  
Convinced somehow that just as all the objects I look at are bent upon some errand of use or joy,  
Even the shifting clouds overhead upon some errand, even the water itself upon some errand,  
So too am I even if I cannot explain it to myself bent upon some errand of eternal noble purport.

Do you think the ships go out through the bay to the sea and that is the last of it?

Do you think the cargoes aboard the ships are delivered at some port and that is the last of it?

Do you think the crews who man the ships and the passengers go to some other place and that is the last of it?

Do you think that life itself seeds and harvests the earth for a season and disappears and that is the last of it?

There is something more: I am not able to make too much  
of right and left north and south,  
But there is something more and that the most wonderful  
yet remaining still to come to all,  
Giving the final meanings and the justification to the puzzles of days and nights,  
Making of one issue voyage and voyagers and ports and the  
endless new beginnings of souls.

I see you crying bitter tears, my darling, but I do not think  
that is all there is to it:

I see children grow pale working in mills and mothers there  
with them working with thin fingers and dull eyes,

I see fathers driven like cattle to their trades with little pay  
to balance the wear and tear of hope,

I see nations conquer nations and cruel shame put on peoples  
innocent of crime or aggression,

I see the farms and the stores and the factories ravaged by  
rents and interests and profits,

I see those who loaf rewarded with exhaustless treasure and  
those who labor outraged, reduced to the last cent:

It is all bad to look at, all impossible to make light of, my  
heart revolts and challenges its destruction:

Yet I know that is not all there is to it: I know there is  
more to come:

The story is not concluded in the shadow, is not finished  
with failure:

There is more to it: there is sunlight to it on a little  
farther—believe me:

There is more to it: there is success to it on a little farther  
—believe me.

The tree that so liberally gave us fruit is dead on the  
ground,

The leaves that rustled for us in musical winds are powder  
to the dust of the earth,

The house that sheltered our dear mothers and fathers and  
others before them was last night consumed by fire.

No one says that is the end of it: we know better: we feel  
what we do not see:

The door may open and shut but there is always something  
both sides of the door:

Is there less entailed with you darling sisters darling brothers  
my comrades?

I say that no matter whether the door does open and shut  
you are always on one side or the other of the door.

I do not say goodbye to the ship that sails away down the  
broad river:

The officer stands on the bridge and waves his hand to me  
as he passes and I wave my hand back,

But that does not mean that the ship is sailing without  
a purpose never to arrive anywhere:

For even the ship that goes down in the stormy seas arrives  
somewhere and arrives living and secure:

Out of the wreckage rises the soul of the ship to sail freely  
its deeper ceaseless seas:

Not less surely shall your soul and my soul rise however  
submerged to be piloted from port to port of joy.

I salute the ferryman who smiles at me knowingly: He  
seems to me like an angel there ushering me to a pas-  
sage across to the unseen:

Then the boat leaves the dock: out in the stream we join  
the fleet of carriers:

Going, coming, the sun overhead, my interior resolution,  
the swift current: nothing in all the scene adrift.

Dear river, you flow towards God whether you ebb or flood:

Dear ships, you sail towards God whether you set forth or return:

And you, dear souls, you who are sisters I love and brothers I love,

Do you do less? with none of these adrift are you adrift? oh! are you adrift?

With everything else sailing towards God whichever way they sail can you be adrift?

Take me by the hand: I will not falter or recall my reassuring words:

We too hand in hand, loving and seeing justice done in the market place,

We too sail towards God and could not in whatever rebellion change our course.

I behold the vision of souls sailing towards God with the ships sailing and the tides sailing,

I behold even the sorrow and the evil sailing towards God with the joy sailing and the good sailing,

When I cross the river in the morning.

## WHEN I GO HOME LATE AT NIGHT

When I go home late at night,

After the store is closed, after the office is locked,

Footsore, soulsores, with treading the mill of the market,

Like a tired steersman letting go the wheel for awhile, resigning the ship to other hands,

The triumphs of the day as tasteless to me as the defeats of the day,

Getting the record well into the background and regarding it there with equable eyes,

Then I feel as if the little matters and the big matters no longer usurp each others' places,

Then I feel as if the misunderstood things are made plain  
and understood,

Then I feel as if my money no longer quarrels with my  
heart and comes to blows:

A great calm descends upon me: a strange beautiful conviction  
of content:

The sad questions are lost in the glad answer: the cruel  
journey is lost in the kind welcome:

Then all my brothers and sisters wherever they are on the  
earth take their equal place in my love.

The world of the night—the world of the revellers and the  
strayers:

The world of the night—the nocturnal freeground of the  
spirit:

The world of the night—the shadow, the veil: behind it  
the lifedrift.

Do you ever beckon this faraway world through your own  
open door?

This is not the world of reputations or the world of saints,  
This is not the world of the orderly or the world of the  
formal good:

This is the world of the homeless and the world of the  
derelicts:

This is my world—the world where my outcast comrades  
pay penance of pain for my desire,

This is the big world the little world forgets—the victim  
glory my victor shame unfolds:

The savior world of corruption, the redemptist world of  
crime:

This is the world soiled and illicit upon whose cross no  
aureole falls—

The world of men and women despised dear to me beyond  
the dearest forever.

I go my pilgrim way: my staff is the surfeit of my love:  
The newsboy sells me the morning paper asking: How are  
you, mister?

The policeman at the corner as I swing into view lifts his  
club in salute:

I catch up with a crowd of Dagoes just over, their packs on  
their backs: one of them nods to me:

A girl fair faced comes up to me curious to know if I dont  
want to go with her and have a good time—

(O God! how bad for both of us, equal innocents, that  
good time would be!)

I stop in the cafe: the waiter sweetens my lunch with price-  
less superfluous inquiries:

The conductor on the trolley tells me about his hard luck  
taking a try west and getting nothing to do,

The motorman whips up his speed a bit as he is late and is  
anxious for me to make my boat:

The ticket taker at the ferry says to me: You'll find it fine  
on the water this morning!

The deckhands come along after the boat is started and sit  
next me perhaps not saying a word:

So it goes: the dear nothings, the dear everythings, these  
and more too, treasured and inimitable:

I go my pilgrim way: my staff is the surfeit of my love.

All these things are commonplace, but they are life:

They are not unusual, not dressed up, but they are life:

They are diversions in the general current, pools in the field,  
but they are life:

I would not like to miss any one of them, not the least of  
them:

I would rather miss the moonshine and the stars and the  
flowing river,

I would rather miss anything else than miss one of them:

They are more necessary to me than suns that give life,  
For they go farther, they give supreamer life, they give the  
life of lives:

For it is not the flame that lights the little fires, it is the  
little fires that make the flame:

Innocent as they seem of grandeur they are the passports of  
paradise:

The darling common greetings of the friendly world as I  
pass along,

The convincing final customary hellos and how do you dos  
as our paths for a moment meet:

The everyday man coming so close O so close to my every-  
day self in that flash of recognition.

When I step out into the familiar streets in the dead of  
night with my live faith,

Greeting my sisters and brothers wilful unsubdued as they  
greet me with rudimentary signals:

Maybe a waif boy or girl touching my hand just for love's  
first and last sweet sake:

Then I know which of the world's goods I rate highest and  
would do the most for:

Then I know I would do the most for the ungarnished  
populace of the pavements,

As that mysterious reservoir of benefaction does the most  
for me—

With no glistening dazzling array of motives does the most  
for me:

Taking off my sickened soul the unbearable burden of its  
superiorities,

After all alienating ambitions leading me home to myself:

This bath of man washing me clean: this flush of love  
transfiguring the crowd:

When I go home late at night.

## POWER IS NOT RULE

Power is not rule—it is refusal of rule,  
Power is not leadership—power is lost in the crowd:  
Have you gone seed gathering among humble things?  
Content to be out of sight, happy to be the hidden root?  
The satisfied hand of some good deed withdrawn in the  
darkness?  
Power is not in what you do but in what you refrain from  
doing:  
Power does not subjugate, it invites:  
Power is only irresistible when it stands pleading before  
those who could not resent it.

## JUST TO OWN MY OWN SOUL

If all the voices of men called out warning you and you could not join  
your voices with their voices,  
If all the faces of men were turned one way and you met them face to  
face you going another,  
You still must not be persuaded to capitulation, you will remember  
that the road runs east as well as west.

And he said to his enemies:

I wait, I wait, I wait, to be sure that your severest word is said  
So that I may withdraw and address to myself severer words.

In your heart are barricades, there forever are prepared dire battles for  
supremacy,  
The most desperate battles are fought without blood, unseen, in  
awful silence,  
And well do you know that every man is the hero of a thousand bar-  
ricades—  
Not less Fox than Hugo, not less he who, fighting, fell degraded by  
some sin, than he who, triumphant, was immortal in his trumpeted  
virtue—  
Lincoln and his assassin, Burr and Andre, and in every man all his  
faculties, not one inopportune.

## JUST TO OWN MY OWN SOUL

Just to own my own soul,  
To come into the day earlier than the sun,  
To accept the night before its first shadow has arrived,  
To start the make of worlds in my own nebula,  
To practice self denial in the hot fire of indulgence,  
To stop the clock and to time myself to the hours of the  
heart,  
To find the north of the soul and the south of the soul  
compassed forever by a dauntless will,  
To gather myself together out of the crowd,  
To gather the crowd fondly within my heart,  
To be impatient of lovers in order to love:  
These are the laws and the provisions of the voyage of the  
soul,  
These are the abundant winds that drive my soul craft into  
the lone seas,  
These are the cloudbreaks and the waveshallops of the pas-  
sage of the soul.  
Think of the ages I have traveled just to be what I am, and  
now that I am what I am you ask me to become some-  
thing else.  
Think of the roots of me, where they go,  
Think of my trial years of disaster before I could stand on  
my feet,  
Think of the animal forms and the vegetable forms I had to  
cast aside before I shook hands with you today with  
my hat on my head,  
Think of what I have given up to get here and why being  
here at all is a mysterious result and is to lead to still  
other results:

Now you would sweep me aside, now you would make me  
of no account.

You would take me into your parlors and incline my soul  
to the declension of your faith,

You would sing me a tyrant song and cut my music down  
to the dead beat of your ratatoo,

You would servant me and master me to the slave processes  
of the earth,

You would leave me nothing of myself but a remnant, a  
reminiscence, a goodbye!

I cannot stand it, I must be alone: desert me, hate me!

By God! I am never safe while you love me:

Get off my road! Do you not see that you choke the room  
and I want fresh air?

Do you not see that I am bound ankle and wrist by love  
and must break free?

I surrender you everything—take it—go: give me the great  
plain to myself:

Take your universe, take your arts, take your wardrobes and  
your showdrags:

I do not ask you to leave me a scrap—leave only me.

I have fed the long harvests of the ages for this, for the  
fruit of my soul's tree.

I went to man with my love before my love was ready,

I withdraw from man until my love has become so sure of  
itself that it dares to go with other loves.

I do not part with you in anger, dear kinsmen:

I am not a safe companion, you are not safe for me.

I am leagues of ages aloof, I am ten thousand stars away,  
yet I cry for room, I push you still farther into space,

Wild to love you, yet suffocated with your love,

Gladly laying at your door every right and every property I  
possess,

Just to own my own soul.

## LET ME BE SELF APPROVED

Let me be self approved.

Once I looked for God's approval and served God with abject favor.

Now I look only for self approval, for I have learned that God's approval would noway help me if I did not approve myself.

I wished for the approval of men and bowed to the meanness of men to get it,

I wished for the approval of my estate and accepted its incomes to get it,

I wished for the approval of the suit I wore and of the food I ate and dressed myself fool and ate myself hog to get it,

I wished for the approval of the scholars and rehearsed in dead cultures to get it,

I wished for the approval of the soldiers and murdered my brothers to get it,

I wished for the approval of the statesmen and lied in the word of the law to get it:

And so I left myself behind and traveled everywhere asking for my discarded consort,

And that is why men gazed at me and asked me what I was looking for and I never could tell them—

And that is why I put the universe into a scale and found it short weight and charged up a bill against it.

All round me were men and women restless with resentments toward life,

Men and women who had put life away in their cashboxes and sat before a dead resolution mourning their lost children,

Men and women who had deferred themselves to something not themselves and gone short in the investment,

Men and women who believed they could put themselves  
in pawn and redeem themselves at will,  
The dear men and women nearest to me and farthest from me  
who took their heritage at the full and left it empty.

The root of the tree was self approved, then came the tree,  
The dream of the picture was self approved, then came the  
picture,  
The forenotes of the song were self approved, then came  
the song,  
The instinct of the good deed was self approved, then  
came the good deed.  
The regret of the robber was self approved, then he gave  
back the goods,  
The repentance of the murderer was self approved, then his  
soul became guiltless,  
The awakening of the successful man was self approved,  
then he refused success.

Until the soul is self approved what counts the approval of  
the world?  
Until the skill of the arm is self approved what becomes of  
the skill of the arm?  
Until the honor of the meal is self approved what becomes  
of the substance of the meal?  
Until the love of the lover is self approved what becomes  
of the seed of his love?

Let me not be self deceived:  
Let me not put hands in trespass upon my own body,  
Let me not put thought in trespass upon my own mind,  
Let me not put love in trespass upon my own heart,  
Let me be unclean but let me not prove to myself that I am  
clean,

Let me turn brute among men but let me not convince myself that I am gentle,  
Let me dishonor woman but let me not recognize my dishonor as love,  
Let me stray in and out of myself always freely acknowledged to the last atom of my disgrace—  
Myself with myself, wandered and fallen, wanton and cruel,  
Giants forever face to face in the trial hours of the soul.

Do you think I would ever do man an evil turn if I was honest with myself?  
I am never dishonest with other men—I could not be:  
I am only dishonest with myself—I am a traitor turned loose underground.  
I am not errant because my greed has its victims:  
I am errant because my victims have a victim who is myself.

There is no gap between men—there is only a gap in the man:  
There is no gap between the rich and the poor—there is only the blank space between the rich and the poor in my heart:  
There is no conqueror and no conquered—there is only an abyss in me between my two souls weeping for union:  
There is no master and no slave—there is only the mastery and slavery of my two natures within me reaching over a dreadful hiatus of desire.

Let me be self approved:  
Once I prayed to God for myself and went hungry and thirsty with a full meal:  
Now I pray to myself for God and though my lips receive neither food nor drink I am fed on richest returns.

## I PRAY TO MY SOUL

I pray to my soul.

I lock out the priest, I prohibit God, I forget how to read  
the books,

I refuse all presences but that presence which issues in  
my self.

My self alone in prayer to my self alone.

I pray to my soul.

I pray to be saved from all narrowness of self,

I pray to be saved from all breadth of self,

I pray to be saved from the pertinence of my body,

I pray to be saved from the invisibility of my soul,

I pray to be saved from that which saves and that which  
damns,

I pray to be saved from light and from darkness,

I pray for release from my talents and from my idiocies—  
from what I am proud of and what I am ashamed of,

I pray for release from that which separates and that which  
binds,

I pray for prayer alone and self alone ever and ever.

I pray to my soul.

I pray for defeats, I pray for dishonor,

I crave to share with everybody the worst and best that  
comes.

I have adjourned all christs and scriptures,

I have adjourned all saviors and synods,

I have adjourned the moralists and the curists,

I have paid the debts of heaven with the debts of hell, and  
hell's debts with heaven's, and cancelled heaven and  
hell,

I have opened myself to but one soul—my own,

I have opened myself to but one commandment—my soul's  
dear word.

I pray to my soul.

All injustice the earth owns to is the work of man outside  
himself

When man works inside himself he will achieve the last  
charity:

Then superior and inferior will be dismissed,

Then possession and poverty will be dismissed,

Then nothing will be left but God, nothing but my divine  
unit and yours,

The self raised high to self devoutly lifted in prayer.

### THERE IS NOT ENOUGH

There is not enough bad in the universe to damn any man,

There is not enough good in the universe to save any man:

Man is not to be saved or damned—he is to be fulfilled.

I do not go outdoors and ask favors of the gods: I stay  
where I am: the gods come to me:

There is rain enough in my heart to water the face of the  
earth,

There is sun enough in my brain to warm the clustering  
and hungry stars.

We have saved men and damned men until God has tired  
of the miserable trade:

When the account was made up, after all the saving and  
damning, there were nothing but ciphers either way.

What could save the oppressed but justice and what could  
save the oppressor but that same justice?

God could no more give salvation than withhold it: God is  
salvation:

When God ceases to be salvation God is no longer God.  
We rear temples to save men: hereafter we will build them  
to save God:  
We steal fortunes to save our estate: we will give them up  
to save ourselves.  
The miner starves for bread and the master of the miner  
starves for bread:  
Until both eat of the same loaf neither can possess.  
As if there was salvation for anyone while there was not  
salvation for all,  
As if there was riches for one until there was riches for all.  
The nearer you bring men to each other the nearer you  
have brought God to man:  
What God can do for you is of least importance: what you  
can do for God is everything:  
What love can do for you is as nothing but what you can do  
for love fulfils the law.  
How little is God while God simply busies himself making  
planets out of the cooling gases!  
How great is God while God is watching an atom turn to  
love!  
Did we believe that God was coming from somewhere to  
save man's soul?  
God has always been here saving God's self.

### MY HEAVEN IS FULL OF WORDS BUT I DESIRE LOVE

My heaven is full of words but I desire love,  
My heaven is crowded to the doors with good people but I  
hunger for sinners,  
My heaven is dazed with suns—everywhere suns—but I  
crave for the shadows,

My heaven is the confirmation of the prophets but I am  
wayward and the prophets bore me,

My heaven is the home of the saints but I shrink from  
the saints and disdain their prerogatives.

I had done all I could to enrich life and point it the way of  
my heaven:

Finally I arrived—the last doubting step was taken.

Having achieved heaven heaven was not heaven—it tried  
the patience of my spirit.

Heaven was great reward—but reward was discounted in  
its own mathematics.

Heaven was great joy—but what use had I for joy until all  
others were absolved?

Heaven was peace—but I did not want peace: peace is  
death.

Heaven was the unattainable attained—but I did not wish  
to close my account with desire.

Round me stood the triumphing masters: Yes, I said, you  
have kept faith!

Round me were choristers—the poets and orators and the  
great preachers of an abolished earth.

But I was unhappy—I stood there in the vast concourse and  
wept:

Wept not for joy but grief: wept not for having succeeded  
but because I had not failed—

I, heaven's own, having won heaven, consumed with regret  
over the lost paradise of my imperfections!

And so somehow there was a power reached forth from  
infinity into the midst of the orbs,

And the heavens were parted by clouds and loud noises pre-  
vailed and flames played forth their perturbant horror,

And out from the midst of the saved I was cast as one not  
holy enough to endure their beauty,

I, back to martyrdom and man, consigned again to earth's  
promiscuous dust.

Now I knew how to love,

Now I knew where to follow grief and where to root my  
dreams,

Now I entered as never before into the waywardnesses of  
simple men,

Now I found unsuspected paths leading off from my elect  
raptures to the general joy,

Now I accepted perils I had once shirked to the unsuspect-  
ing,

Now I paced easily with the average pulse, reckoning my  
gains by the successes of others,

Now I passed into shadows without misgiving and came  
back from expeditions heartrich with the spoil of  
empty hands,

Now I lifted my claims only to the level of the poorest men  
and refused to go a foot higher,

Now I saw that all paradise was rehearsed in the innocent  
acts of every day,

Now I was one with the all of failure and one with the all  
of success,

And now I looked up to the heaven rejected and gratefully  
clung to my artless tasks.

My heaven is in the silences: it is barren of pettifogging  
words,

My heaven is peopled with the creatures of immolating pas-  
sions,

My heaven contains neither saved nor damned—my heaven  
contains only love,

My heaven is not given to distinction—it flows out fulltide  
to the obscure and the useless,

My heaven is simply you when you love me and I when I  
love you,  
My heaven is the promise seized and kept at hand, the partial  
favor yielded to the whole,  
Heaven's completeness verified in the arrival of the last  
derelict,  
Heaven's earth and heaven's heaven one in an impartial  
destiny,  
The result withheld from none and not postponed.

### SOMEWHERE A FACT STANDS IN ITS PLACE

Somewhere a fact stands in its place:  
It does not stand in the place of some other fact,  
It does not dispute any place with any other fact,  
It does not spell its name in the biggest letters or call it out  
loudest,  
It just stays where it belongs, it just obeys its law,  
It, the fact, the darling daring fact, there in its place.

Somewhere a fact stands in its place:  
The nations send their fleets out against it,  
The religions send their priests out against it,  
The money makers send their pirates out against it,  
But after they have all gone and come home,  
After they have brought the heaven down to the earth,  
After they have lifted the earth up to heaven,  
The fact is still in its place, steadfastly doing its part.

Somewhere a fact stands in its place:  
It is a tree, it is a mouse, it is anything great or small,  
But before it is anything great or small it is a fact:  
The primal fact innocent of gladness or woe,

The fact sure of itself and its place,  
The fact hoarding no coward laurels,  
Always the fact, the fact alone.

Somewhere a fact stands in its place:  
The fact, a drop of blood, holding the universe at bay,  
The fact, an unspoken love, rejecting the world's assault,  
The fact, a purpose, in you deposited, braving flattery and  
the mob,  
The fact in its place, from which no hatred can expel it,  
Love the fact in its place attracting all power to itself,  
The great cause the fact in its place stemming the world's  
retreat.

Somewhere a fact stands in its place:  
The fact my soul faithful to its native dreams,  
The fact my soul making all paths its own,  
The fact that burns at the stake and is the fact still,  
The fact that you shoot in battle and that comes back to  
you after the peace,  
The fact in its place, the stubborn unsparing fact,  
The fact my soul not pausing or hastening its deeds.

Somewhere a fact stands in its place:  
The fact myself as much fact as any,  
The fact myself to which all other facts converge,  
Always when in its place invulnerable,  
Always when in its place the sun of the orbited planets,  
The fact of all facts to the soul the one fact to respect,  
The fact the self rank as earth and clean as a fresh wind,  
The fact in its place warning trespassers off.

Somewhere a fact stands in its place:  
The fact the self to which the universe reports,

The fact in its place the soul,  
The soul in its place the fact.

### WHEN I WAS YOUNG

When I was young and accepted the assurances of my fathers  
and mothers,  
Before I got acquainted with God and before I got ac-  
quainted with myself,  
While I waited on the outside of things watching for doors  
to open and clouds to break,  
While the priest prepared me for heaven and the policeman  
prepared me for earth and I prepared myself for nothing,  
Then I worshiped a bible and a pulpit, a book thumbed in  
a church,  
And expected to break a way to salvation while the guards  
of heaven were asleep.

Bibles, I said, were plenty, the fruit of the easiest success,  
Any print shop could make me a bible and take me to  
heaven,  
And I admitted that if Jesus could intercede with God any  
priest could intercede with Jesus,  
And if alphabets made words and words phrases and phrases  
bibles, then alphabets were bibles and if I learned an  
alphabet I was a saved man.

It was a great satisfaction to know I was saved,  
To know that I enjoyed advantages over other men,  
That a priest said that a book said so and that my eyes con-  
firmed the book and the priest,  
That for my superior virtues I could chariot my body to  
heaven and gather my reward in glory,

That some one went to a high place for me once and in my  
name received a tablet,  
And that in such a drama of the soul's seasons I was to play  
a master part,  
Basking in the rapture of the firmament forever.

But this all transpired in my sleep.  
And something happened to me and shook me awake,  
And that great peace of self which surpasses the nonchalance  
of eternity was eclipsed in an adverse verdict,  
And the priest fell away in a pit, I could not see where,  
And the bibles, too, followed their priest, and the same pit  
engulfed them,  
And all the superiorities of salvation hastened by the same  
way to oblivion,  
And here I stood alone on the brink of life, bare, stript to  
the soul,  
Facing the rude surprises of the flesh.

What need of bibles now, I asked, while men and women  
last?  
While the roots of trees last and the seas sweep up the  
shores?  
While slaves of markets last and slaves we call masters last?  
While there are errands left for the soul to run why should  
words be laid away to die?  
While suns continue to blaze why should words be called in  
to put out their fires?

For now the bibles, the everyday people, came near, and  
said: Read the words of our sorrow.  
For now the bibles, the cries of the oppressed for justice,  
crowded about me and said: Take this text for the les-  
son of your redemption.

For now the bibles, the haunted mills, the devastating  
    mines, spelled out the demurrers of the silences and  
    said: Take from us the commandments of a new law.  
For these, I saw, were bibles more than bibles,  
To these Jesus must give up the cross of his inheritance,  
To these the ancient prophets and disciples have resigned  
    their portfolios:  
To these all administrators defer administration and all  
    judges consign judgment:  
To these, messaging me in the dawn of the day I awoke,  
In the dawn of the day convincing me of life,  
After the darkness of the night that had only convinced me  
    of death.

## I, TOO, HAVE A BIG PLACE TO FILL IN THIS LITTLE WORLD

I, too, have a big place to fill in this little world:  
I, too, am a creator of results, a master of harvests:  
I, too, am to report what I think of the farthest meanings  
    of things:  
I, too, must hereafter be listened to respectfully even by my  
    enemies:  
In the finish of the stars nothing can be left out without  
    ruin to the rest—  
The least significant object cant be left out without ruin to  
    the most significant—  
So that my place, humble as it is, is as great as any other's  
    place,  
And though I shine ever so little I shine as brightly as any  
    other who shines ever so much,  
For the substance of a man is not in what he measures him-  
    self to be but in what he is,

For the collateral of a man is not in his perishable conquests  
but in his imperishable loyalty,  
For the only real victory of all victories coming to a man is  
the victory of his love though it is a victory of defeat.

I call myself out from where I was hidden:  
I have been ashamed to sign my own name: now I sign it  
with a bold stroke.  
I have let the illustrious precede and obscure me as if I was  
a reproach to God:  
I have always taken last places, making way without ques-  
tion for any one who pushed ahead:  
I have been quick to assume you, O my brother, whatever  
you are, and slow to assume myself:  
I have permitted money and power and position to go be-  
fore me unquestioned:  
I have stood aside for my betters, always rating myself at a  
discount:  
And so the world has marched over me, booted and spurred,  
as if I was an alien,  
And so the world has taken me at my word and arrogantly  
assisted in my effacement,  
And so the world has assigned to me nothing but the use-  
less leavings of life.

Now I rise in revolt—now I lift up my bowed head and  
shake my mane:  
Now I turn a new page of the book—turn to my page: I  
demand that you listen to me:  
Now my call is heard: I raise my voice to its loudest pitch:  
listen!  
I step out from my own littleness into my own immensity:  
I no longer play second whether or no, reporting for only  
the minor roles:

I feel at last as if there were sufficient grounds for my introduction among you:

I feel as if there would be a flaw in the argument if I failed to appear—

I feel as if the curtain would have to be rung down and I would have to be sent for:

I, who have been so long excluded by excluding myself:

I, now fully awake, calling lustily to my own soul to conform to its size and style.

You thought you were forgotten when the inventory of the earth was made out—

You thought all the half men were counted in and made much of but though you were not worth while: you thought you were set aside.

You allowed the dandies to have their way with the universe, pushing everyone else off the edge:

You took the back seats: you sat on the hard boards: you gave away that for which you starved.

I ask the seed: Why should you be humble before the tree?

I ask the wave: Why should you be humble before the sea?

I ask the rock: Why should you be humble before the mountain?

Why should you? Why should you be humble before the finish of what you began?

I ask the sun: Why should you be humble before the day?

I ask the crowd: Why should you be humble before the child?

I ask the law: Why should you be humble before the executioner?

You should be humble but you should be humble only before your own soul:

You should not put anything in place of your soul and be humble before that:

Not money, not a man (not the greatest man), not a cause,  
nothing:

Nothing should be put in place of your own soul: the soul  
is supreme:

The big soul, the little soul, any soul: it does not signify:  
the soul is supreme:

Oh! be careful divine dear brother what you do with your  
soul—how reverently you treat your soul:

Once you put anything in place of it it is hard to get back!  
oh, so hard!—

If you put money in place of it or even learning or even  
love (mad tempting love) it is all up with the soul:

You can do anything else and get back but if you have put  
something in place of the soul you may find you can  
never get back!

Now I rank highest and lowest—I take my proper station:

Now I belong to the few who are no better than the many  
and to the many who are as good as the few:

I quote my stock high: mountains could not reach to it nor  
suns that light their crests:

I see no reason further why I should toss myself into the  
void:

I, too, have a big place to fill in this little world.

## I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

I have an appointment with God:

And whatever is missed that has to be kept:

And though all was missed—the very globe itself, the skies:  
though that was missed:

Though all love was missed—and my neighbors and family  
and success were missed: though they were all missed:

I must be on the right spot at the time fixed for me: must  
be there body and soul:

In day or night, in sunshine or storm, in life or death, I  
must be there:

To take up my note with God in person: (no emissary  
could assume my place):

I must be there eye to eye with God to redeem the sacred  
obligation:

In cruelty or blight, in mercy or fertility, I must be there  
without fail:

The whole universe, God, on the one side, and I, a single  
man on a minor star, on the other side:

On the day long ago set appearing without forfeit: God  
appearing with me: to settle our little account.

I have an appointment with God and will keep it: I will be  
on the spot at the time fixed: my body, my soul, will  
be there:

But just as much God has an appointment with me and  
God will not default:

For somehow the beautiful contract wont work unless both  
are faithful,

And it would be no disgrace to God to be as loyal to me as  
I am expected to be to God:

The debt must be paid both ways until no balance is left on  
either side:

The debt of God to me so vast accruing and my debt to  
God piled up in mountainous eras of time:

I have an appointment: I will keep it: I will pay:

And that which I pay will be receipted for with more life  
until I am poured full and satisfied.

Nothing else matters: only God matters and I matter:

The other things may result as they will: they do not matter:

But I by my truce must round up in God and God by God's  
truce must round up in me:

This matters much—this matters all: that this should come  
out right:

If God went astray looking for me or I went astray looking  
for God: that would matter all:

It would be as if the earth went astray looking for the sun  
or the sun went astray looking for the earth:

It belongs to God to be as extra careful about me as for me  
to be extra careful about God,

So that what was so wonderfully arranged for far back  
should come out just as was intended:

The fates across the farthest stretches of the years handing  
me to God just as I should be:

That matters much—matters all: that no item of this in-  
heritance should be ignored:

I meeting God perfectly equipped and worthy of God for-  
ever:

God meeting me perfectly equipped and worthy of me for-  
ever.

I have an appointment with God: I dont mean to dodge or  
postpone it:

It is not way off somewhere in time and the skies: no; it is  
today and right here:

I did not make the appointment—it was made for me ages  
before I was born:

I see what it commits me to: I stand by it: the pledge  
taken for me I will keep:

They knew very well what I would come to: the fathers of  
my fathers—they knew very well:

When they signed my name for me they signed my heart:  
they knew the divine quality of their act: they left  
nothing to be added:

They looked on and on: they foresaw me on expanding  
horizons: I was to them the same as already here:  
Then they waited: they passed from the byways of the flesh:  
they turned into the common road:  
Long after I appeared: O revered countless fathers!—ap-  
peared to make good for you.

What will I bring God to pay off my debt with?  
I must be mighty careful that I bring the right stuff or I'll  
be sent back shamed and dishonored:  
I must bring God genuine stuff or God can make no use of  
what I offer to pay:  
I must bring God love or the purport of love and nothing  
short of it: I must: I must:  
I must bring justice or the purport of justice: must bring  
cheer or the purport of cheer:  
Without this all I bring or anyone brings would be laughed  
at and rejected:  
All the show and the wrong and the pride of the rich over  
the poor would be rejected:  
All the traitorous arts, all the deserting cultures, would be  
rejected:  
Nothing will do, nothing will count, but love and the pur-  
port of love:  
From judges, statesmen, poets, workmen, anybody—noth-  
ing but love and the purport of love:  
It would be hopeless to bring anything but love or the  
purport of love—oh, so hopeless!—and expect to get  
through.

I have an appointment with God: and whatever is missed  
that must be kept:  
I have a debt to settle with God: and whatever is paid  
crooked that must be paid straight:

I have made a contract with God: and whatever matters  
nothing that matters all:  
I stand to the agreement: I don't ask to be let off: nor does  
God: we are on good terms with each other:  
And love alone will pay: will pay from me to God: will  
pay from God to me:  
Nothing less than love will pay: I must pay with love: and  
God must pay:  
(Oh, I feel full of God's love even now: I wonder if God  
has not already overpaid?):  
Not the love lovers talk about: no: the love lovers live:  
that love alone:  
There may be other ways: I see only love: and God—what  
does God see?  
The hour strikes (O God, I am here!): I have an appoint-  
ment with God.

## THEY SAY I AM TOO FAMILIAR WITH GOD

They say I am too familiar with God,  
They say that I talk of God as if he lived next door,  
They say that I use God's name as freely as if it was my  
name or my child's name or the name of my bosom  
friend:  
I am accused of being on speaking terms with God,  
I am taken to task for shaking hands with God and walking  
with him arm in arm:  
They tell me that I have been known to contradict God  
just as if he might be wrong and I might be right.  
Well—I admit their charges. I admit that everything they  
bring up against me is true.  
I think God and I are in pretty good feather with each  
other,

It seems to me God is even a good deal nearer to me than  
next door—

Oh! I could not tell you how much nearer—how much, how  
much:

Why, if I was to say he was as near as in my own house I  
would not near tell how near he is.

God used to be shoved off somewhere in space, way off, so  
nobody could touch him,

The farther off he was the more God he was: the less he  
loved man the more man was to love him:

The priests retired him to the remotest distances and stood  
between and taxed men for interceding with the  
recluse.

I dont think I could have much use for God if he had no  
use for me,

I dont think I care about God if he must be far away and  
cannot be approached and consorted with,

I dont think I fancy God much if it takes somebody to in-  
troduce us,

I dont think God stands for what I need if he withdraws  
himself to impossible heavens,

Nothing will satisfy me but to have God next to me wher-  
ever I am,

Nothing will do for God but to be about things and in  
things whatever is happening.

I want to know just how and where to find God when I am  
hungry and thirsty for God:

God has held himself aloof long enough—has refused to  
make his earthbond good,

Now we want God to come down off his high horse and  
mix with the crowd.

There are fool worshipers who are straining their eyes blind  
to see God making a show of himself on the mountain  
tops,

But I have better use for my sight—I see God at work in my own hands, too busy to hunt up the cross.

I do not feel that I need to lift myself above my average foothold to reach God—

I stay where I am and find the secret disclosed in the open day.

The priests chant obeisances to God and address God in tones of awe,

I find my native tongue good enough to use with God—

Yes, I find that God understands me best when I speak a language I myself am at home with:

I would feel lonesome and ready to give up if I thought God was above being my companion—was my master giving commands.

Yes, God and I are well acquainted:

We do not need to be reminded of each other by introducers,

And what God does for me is too wonderful to be set down with figures in an argument,

And I do not question but that what I do for God is no insignificant item.

There are fathers and mothers and children and they are very close to each other—oh! so close!

And there is the comrade, too—he is very close to his comrade: oh! so close!

But when I think of God and try to tell how that we are dear inseparable lovers, oh! words are too shabby to tell how close we are!

They say I am too familiar with God, but I don't hear God say so:

Do not worry, dear brothers—no one can be too familiar with God.

You can no longer put God away somewhere in a secret place—

In the barren years God was so far to the north his comfort was cold when it reached the heart,

Now God is the closest by: we do not need even to go into the next house to find him:

I have made God common to the commonest earth—he is the genius of every day and the crowd:

I have made God my brother where once I was told he was my ruler:

I have done this: do you not feel God and acknowledge his free providence?

They say I am too familiar with God!

## WHEN I AM MOST AT HOME WITH MYSELF

When I am most at home with myself,

When I welcome myself at the front door and the back door,

When I welcome myself returned from heaven and returned from hell,

When the worst of me meets the best of me on equal terms,

Then I feel at last that I am getting acquainted with myself,

Then I shake hands with the universe and begin to see its meanings.

I was in the farther past a stranger to myself,

I wandered alone in the world seeking a companion,

I lied to myself out of the fulness of words,

I assailed myself out of the fulness of deeds.

There I was forever the criminal in my own dock,

There I was perpetually self accused,

There I was condemned to hard penances and forfeits of servitude,

There I was counsel for my own conviction,  
There I was in session as a court of last resort hearing my  
    own appeal with deaf ears.  
The one thing in me cried out against the other thing in  
    me,  
Over vast distances calling I challenged myself to defeat,  
From the faroff abysses of self discord came the nearby des-  
    pairs of the gulf.

I think the soul may travel many hells and come from them  
    without hurt,  
But I think that when the soul passes through the hell of  
    self it is wounded to the center.  
I did not know what my sorrow was all about,  
I did not know why I wandered earths through looking for  
    something I could not find,  
I did not know why I was always demanding abroad that  
    which is always at home and only at home:  
But there I was, lost, famished, starving, in the wilderness  
    of my own unstructured self,  
Calling to strangers by name to yield me that which I alone  
    possessed.  
But now I have been introduced to myself,  
And each day the two of us are becoming better acquainted,  
And as we become better acquainted we become better  
    friends,  
And we find in each other unsuspected good points,  
And we no longer seem to need witnesses and evidences  
    and arguments,  
And I look about and see no judge any longer sitting on our  
    case,  
And we are becoming wonderful cronies, myself and me,  
And each time we meet we have something new to tell each  
    other,

And that is why I have said that I am getting quite at home  
with myself,  
And that when I am most at home with myself the universe  
opens its heart to me  
And all mortal severances lapse in immortal joy.

### LET US BE SILENT FROM NOW ON

Let us be silent from now on, the loud voices say:  
The good things have all been said—why say them again?  
The voices gathered at the horizon at sunrise and advised  
the sun not to come up:  
The good sunrises have all happened—why should the sun  
rise again?  
The voices hurried to the ambitious acorn and asked the  
acorn: Why are you fool enough to want to be an oak?  
They asked: Oaks have been oaks for a long time: all the  
real oaks have lived: why add to the humdrum of oaks?  
But the oak did not trouble itself to ask the meaning of the  
oak, it just grew:  
It did not apologize because oaktrees had existed before, it  
was just fulfilled:  
The sun comes up beautiful every morning according to ap-  
pointment—sometimes in cloud, sometimes fair, but  
always beautiful.  
The voices protest but the earth turns and the moon and the  
stars go on attending to their business.  
I too hear the voices and they always say the same thing:  
The voices never go forward—they always go back.  
I do not say that the great things have not all been spoken—  
I only say that I too will speak great truths:  
I do not know but I may speak the greatest truths yet  
spoken.

I do not stop at the germ—I go on to the flower and the fruit:

I do not stop at the impulse to sing: I go on to the song: I sing:

Whether I say old things or new things does not seem to matter,

But whether I say true things does matter a good deal and all.

Whether men lived before I lived does not matter,

But whether I live a big life matters a good deal and all.

The voices call out for retreat but I go on.

I dont know but my honest dream is as original as any,

I dont know but my feet too tread virgin ground,

I dont know but I too am a pioneer going beyond all the settlements,

I dont know but I too say first words in a new tongue:

I dont know—I dont know: how could I know and why should I care to know?

I dont know but I too may help men in their despairs,

I dont know but I may divulge passwords as potential as any that have been bequeathed by the past,

I dont know but the world was begun again bran new the day I came over,

I dont know but my live call will go as far and be as welcome as a dead echo.

God knows I have nothing but honor for the live remains of dead prophets:

I get down off my high horse and worship them, I borrow strength from my proud inheritance:

But I dont see why I should quote them against myself,

But I dont see why I should make them so useful I am no use at all,

But I dont see why they should stand in my way and why I should not have the right to shove them aside.

Yes, I hear the voices, and they declare that the world to-day is no good—only the parent world was good:

But I revolt—I talk up for my own time and the kind of people who go with it.

I say to the voices: Listen to me—I will replace the best words of the saints by the better words of the sinners, I will take the oldest images of love and establish them in newest relations with the heart.

Do you say the many seers of many ages have helped men to live?

I say it before you and after you but I also say I help men to live.

I don't know why today's glory should borrow from yesterday's sunlight,

I don't know why today's hunger should be fed with yesterday's food,

I don't know why I should humble and surrender myself to the phantom procession of my fathers:

I keep the process coherent—I am as vital an atom as any, I coming when I do am as original as any other coming when he may.

Though true lives have always been lived truer lives will always remain to be lived:

I will prove that though supreme things have been said they will remain to be said again,

And I will prove that whatever dead singers may have been to men I will be more than that over again,

And I will prove that I am genuine as any and that it won't pay the world to refuse to listen,

For the same force that of old made use of others is now making use of me,

And ideals imperfect in the best of them are perfect in me, As ideals imperfect in me will be perfect hereafter in my successors.

I dont think all the good things have been said or could be said:

Why, I can hear unborn lovers even now underground, seed-sowers of spiritual prophecy, preparing the harvests of future years:

They will come, all of them, in due time, saying more and more, after I have got through,

Just as I came after others got through as they after others and so on back to the beginning,

No one preferred to the rest.

### ONLY TO LET THINGS GO

Only to let things go,

Only to stop fixing bounds for myself,

Only to do as I please and be happy,

Only to be foolish when the world says I should be wise,

Only to get away from the measurers and give myself a chance to see what I really am,

Only to get my true measure by not taking any measure at all,

Only to see the farthest by not trying to see at all,

Only to hear divine voices by not listening for voices at all,

Only to be myself without making an effort to be myself at all,

Only to wanton with the day and take it without suspicion on its own terms,

Only to get beyond the cry of the strongest voice calling me back,

Only to get where no chase can any longer dog my quickened feet,

Only to wrench my despoiled self free from the habits of the ruly,

Only to salute the fraternity of a world lawlessly superior  
to law.

Only to let things go:

To be as I am when I dream free dreams of myself, and  
dreams are what dreams may be,

To be as I am before I am good or bad, and good and bad  
are what good and bad may be,

To be as I am before the law comes and appoints me a les-  
son in obedience, and obedience is what obedience  
may be,

To be as I am before religion comes and makes me a date  
with the cross, and the cross is what the cross may be,

To be as I am before I become a social asset or an indus-  
trial fact, and assets and facts are what assets and facts  
may be,

To be as I am when love is as love may be,

To be as I am when rebellion is as rebellion may be,

To be as I am when a woman takes me in her arms and is  
as a woman may be,

To be as I am when no one is looking on and honesty is as  
honesty may be,

To be as I am when I am not respectable and manhood is  
as manhood may be,

To be as I am when I do not care whose voices are for me  
or whose against me, and voices are as voices may be,

To be as I am when nothing holds me back and nothing  
pushes me forward, and progress is as progress may be,

To be as I am when the last restraint is removed, and birds  
sing as birds sing, and grasses grow as grasses grow, all  
as they freely may be,

To be as I am when I do not look for victory or defeat,  
and when victory and defeat are as victory and defeat  
may be,

This it is that takes possession of my veins and runs me hot  
and fast with living blood,

This it is that comes to life when life is let alone and  
allowed to pay its debt in the elysian equities of the  
spirit.

Only to let things go! only to let things go!

To hold nothing back for discounts or contingencies,

To check no prophetic impulse,

To pass unstopped beyond the last frontier.

## BEFORE BOOKS AND AFTER BOOKS

Put down your pen, said love, and start again,  
The pen has done for love all that the pen can do,  
The pen has done all things but live, yet life is love.  
Now I demand of you confirming deeds,  
Demand the notes so long accrued—their pay in full,  
The notes of prophet voices and poet rhymes and echoing formulas,  
The notes of sinais, meccas, sepulchers and crosses,  
In lieu of dead postponements long decreed.

The eminent professor handed down the tablets of his superiority from  
a college on high,  
In a dress parade of phrases calling upon the poor world to take off its  
hat to his rich reputation.  
I listened: I heard the noise: I was not convinced.  
Then I went out into the street: the day was wet and chilly:  
A sallow Italian worked there in the trench, digging, shivering:  
He glanced up as I passed, resting on his shovel—  
His eyes looked right in my eyes, friendly like, wondering,  
Then he resumed his work without saying a word. digging, shivering,  
Asking for nothing, accusing no one:  
The silence was enough.

## BEFORE BOOKS AND AFTER BOOKS

Before books and after books is the human soul,  
Before the beauty and eminence of that which is written  
is the superior beauty and eminence of that which is  
written about,  
Before the magnificence of the greatest book comes the  
majesty of the meanest soul.  
O my dear brother, do you propose to retire before the pres-  
ence of a book?  
Do you consent to go away somewhere and let the book  
take your place?  
Is the book so undoubtable and are you so much less  
undoubtable?  
Is the sun to produce the fly and is the sun to blot itself out  
in the derived life of the fly?  
Is the book to mean so many things and do you mean less  
than the book or nothing at all?  
When I am hunting for life do I turn the pages of a book  
or do I lift the skin off your palpitating body?  
The book might not answer the heart but man could not  
refuse to answer the heart,  
The word of the book can easily fail but the word of the  
man cannot fail.  
Have we forgotten the man who wrote the book in remem-  
bering the book?  
Do we put books on the shelves of our libraries and give  
notice that man is no longer necessary?  
Does the book go to bed with us at night and answer us  
hunger for hunger in the appetite of the flesh?  
You know where the book comes from—Oh yes, you know,  
you know:

Do you know where man comes from—Oh, do you know,  
do you know?

The written life has made light of the unwritten life,  
The song that was sung has taken the place of the song  
that was left unsung:

We have united in the praise of words, in the adoration of  
the pageantry of phrases.

Now I seem to hear a voice that calls me back to man,  
Now I seem to hear footsteps that lead me back to the love  
of the body and of the soul,

Now I seem to see all words withdrawn and the divine  
presence of man substituted for the malpresence of  
words,

Now the abused words have retreated to take their places in  
the dictionary,

Now the soul which so long fed upon words may feed upon  
the soul again,

Now the love of man for man may no longer treat through  
halting phrases but may confess to love direct.

At last I have learned the lesson of words which is a lesson  
not of words,

At last I have learned to refer words to the soul and not to  
refer the soul to words,

At last I have seen that words at their best are poor and  
that man at his worst is rich,

At last I have substituted life's order for the chaos of words  
about life,

At last all words however strong and however gentle and  
however beautiful have retired from the avenues of life,

At last I am left alone with the soul and the soul's uncer-  
tainties and the soul's assurances.

For I have made up the whole account of life at last,  
I have shown to myself the totals which so long perplexed  
me,

The totals of life, the added treasure of life, unmixed with  
sordid syllables of speech,  
Taking to my very flesh and my very spirit the throbbing  
body of original law,  
Seeing life again as life was seen before a word of life had  
been spoken,  
Seeing life again as before words about life had taken the  
sacred seat and proclaimed the regime of phrases,  
Seeing finally with inexorable vision the way that life comes  
and the way that life goes whatever may happen with  
words,  
I who know that before books and after books is the human  
soul.

## AFTER ALL IS SAID

After all is said,  
After all the clever talkers have talked,  
After we see that nothing is said until something true is  
said,  
After we learn that true things do not need to be said or to  
be endorsed,  
After we acknowledge that only false things need to be said,  
A curtaining truce of silence falls upon all languages over  
the face of the earth,  
And men far and near who were kept apart from each other  
by speech look into each other's faces in the silences  
and understand.  
Who can account for the mysterious emptiness of words?  
The rivers of the earth flowed before words flowed,  
The stars in space were hot and cold before words were hot  
and cold,  
Poetry was poetry before words came to the poet,

Life held its fragments well together before the logician  
gave logic to words,  
Love loved best before the words of the lover and will love  
best again after all the words of lovers have passed away.  
The world is misled by the wordiness of words,  
Words are stuffed and choked with their stale air,  
And I can already brush dust off the newest words.  
We keep on saying things that have all been said,  
The silences always show words their heels  
Words are for short trips, the silences are for long journeys,  
The silences are home and tucked in bed before words have  
footsored their slow way to a finish.  
After all is said and words are bankrupt,  
The silences take up the task with miracled touch.  
Then the dead fields hasten their harvests.  
And words themselves come along and ask the silences:  
What is your secret?  
Why does everything respond to you and nothing come at  
our will?  
Why do the children nestle up to you and run in terror from  
us?  
Words worded a great mist, the silences came and cleared  
the weather.  
I am sure that if I faced a god or a judge somewhere and  
was asked to account for myself I could not do it in  
words—  
I would have to appeal to the sunrise and sunset and the  
carpenter's bench and the faces of the children to  
account for me.  
For I have seen that the scriptures are not after all in a  
book,  
They are in hearts and in the plainest people,  
They are eloquent in the condemned and those who are  
thought little of,

They are radiant in the men with smirched hands who serve  
the abhorred utilities of the state.  
For so they live, first and last, with unanswerable stern  
power,  
Without word or gesture or protest or plea coming inevit-  
ably to their own,  
After all is said.

### COME, GENTLEMEN, LADIES, MASTERS

Come, gentlemen, ladies, masters,  
Come to the sale of these effects!  
Come in all your pride, come with adornment and blare:  
These were the belongings of a singer, and they must be  
sold for cash.  
Now you are assembled, now you are ready with notebook  
and purse,  
I will submit to you the wares of the dead poet,  
By whose will the world is offered unpriced spoil.  
Here, then, is his dream—what do you bid?  
Nothing? Will no one have it at any price?  
Why do you laugh? Did you come expecting to find the  
customary baubles?  
You are connoisseurs: what do you think of this dream?  
It must be worth much money. Why, he died for it.  
And still you are silent?  
Here are his hopes, too—the spare substance of many a  
meal,  
Here are debts of faith, here are receipts for unpaid credits,  
Here are his long nights of unrequited slavery,  
Here are writs of dispossession and annals of his defeats,  
Here are deeds of cloud lots and liens upon heaven,  
Here are promises of gods and deridings of men.

What rare property it does all make!—and still you do not bid.

What does it mean, gentlemen, ladies, masters?

Not one to bid where so much may be bought?

You would not buy this man in his life—I thought you would buy him in his death.

No? Well, the judges somewhere judge—I do not:

I check off all these effects for heaven—let them ascend with their owner:

These would have made you free.

Come tomorrow again, gentlemen, ladies, masters—

Tomorrow—come with full purses:

I will have tomorrow such attractions in bonds, rivets, fetters, chains,

That all may purchase and all go home satisfied.

### THE MASTER WAITED LONG

The master waited long before he wrote his song:

Long was his hand stayed, mysteriously silent, a dread and sickness possessing his great desire:

In his byworld he wept, in his closet he asked questions, in his fire he turned to ashes the dead leaves of his song:

The master who honored man but could not talk of his love:

The master who knew nothing of himself except his sweet wish to make some mortal event immortal:

The master whose heart was the common heart and whose voice must be the voice of the crowd.

But one day, early in the morning of the day, in the morning after a night of disturbing dreams,

The master awoke: awoke not to the day but to himself:

Some concealed obstruction to his flooded feelings was  
broken down, unseen barriers were swept away, the  
many worlds opened wide in his one heart:  
Voiceless things found music in their silences, dead hopes  
raised their wings for flight again:  
The master was born.

The master was born:  
Born in the lateness of years, born to the dear joy of him-  
self,  
Born away from old hungers, born exempt from ambition,  
born free of the husk of pride, born in the release of  
fraternity:  
The master who waited long, the master whose words would  
not come:  
The master whose dreams moled in the ground.

The master was born but not to words:  
Somehow the words came but the words that came were not  
the words he expected:  
And pathos came but he wept over griefs he was not pre-  
pared for:  
And secrets were divulged but none of them were the se-  
crets of his prophecy:  
And he found himself close to the people, listening to them  
and being listened to:  
And he grew careless about his phrases and careful of his  
love:  
And he watched that no pretty word that was hideous was  
put where the ugly word that was beautiful belonged:  
And so he was much less master than before but far more  
man:  
And so he was watched for by the gaping crowds and held  
preciously in open arms:

The master who had waited long for words and awoke not  
to words that prevent song but to song itself.

With only few words the master sung:

With fewer words than few the master sung:

And a morrow came when not a word was spoken and yet  
all knew the master was singing his master song.

And then it was that all the schools of the earth were razed  
to the ground:

And then it was that scholars retired from the earth and  
debates ceased:

And then it was that a great presence filled everything and  
revived in health all erring life.

What was the unseeable body the master brought?

What was the unheard song the master conceived?

What was the power in him that swayed all wrong to its  
fall?

What was that in his heart long delayed which found its  
voice only in the silence?

What was it that made him from that time dear to suffer-  
ing man?

What was it that through him absolved all suffering from its  
office?

What was it that burst through him in new light from  
a fresh sun?

It is the sacred something which passes between bodies and  
souls that love yet says nothing:

It is the sacred something half kept half revealed which  
needs no middlemen:

The heart of the master in the heart of the crowd:

The heart of the master going down into the world without  
a word:

The heart of the master disputing no more for priorities of words:

The heart of the master whose words no more were words but events and persons:

The heart of the master whose art was a chord in silence.

And it was for this that the master waited long before he wrote his song.

### THE RUSHED AND CROWDED AUDITORS

The rushed and crowded auditors, the gesturing, hurrying figures on the stage,

The lights turned low, the silent watch, the unraveling plot,

The voice of tragedy, the foil of the wit of the clown,

The passion of some bewildering reminiscence in the trick of the voice,

The interplayed melancholy of violins, the uprisen ardor of flutes,

And I, alone, in the midst of all, with my grief.

Up from my seat I sprang,

At my command the auditors dispersed, the players disappeared from the stage,

I cried out my agony till the emptied house eloquently returned my plaint.

The house refilled with the duplicates of myself:

These forgotten and remembered figures filed in, phantomed echoes of departed experience:

One by one they came, quietly seated themselves in foredoomed places—

None of them recognizing each other, all of them recognized by me:

Rudiments of deeds, dark limnings of error, outgrown inheritances and lost fortunes:

The players returned to pursue their parts, they but duplicated me many times over,

The play was the rehearsal of my sorrow and the brute demand for my enfranchisement—

Mad that I was, possessing the scene within my palm,  
I alone, but many tongued with my grief.

Do you think, O actor, that it is you who act the play and that it is I who hear?

From your pedestal I command you—down on your knees to me!

I am your master, you find no play if you do not find me.

Partner player, you bring me myself in manifold disguises,

I am no more your auditor than you are mine, nor your patron paying for you out of my purse;

I pay nothing at the door: I pay only to you, and pay with drops of fostering blood:

And your return is but the return of myself, scorned, loved,  
in varied moods and habits,

But myself alone, myself.

Dear player, I do fondly cherish you and am not less fondly yours,

We play our offices across the footlights, I don't know who plays most, or which side is the strangest drama:

In your dull despair or reawakened hope the walls of the house dissolve and we are of one essence engaged in an eternal venture.

The loud applause is incense but it does not deceive you or me:

Well do we know who made this play and why the gathered people turned it into a shrine and sacrificed on its altar,

You alone, dear player, with me alone, dear player also,  
And the play house haunted.

## I TOO HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO YOU

I too have something to say to you:

I too talk to you freely—the freest of all—now that the  
others are done:

And though I do not raise my voice high and make a noise  
and overdress my words,

And though I do not insist too much upon myself when you  
don't want to listen to me,

Still I push even into forbidden places and say my say in an  
unwavering voice,

Sure as I am that finally you will know what I come for and  
welcome me:

Not today, maybe, or tomorrow: not, maybe, until after  
many todays and tomorrows:

Not at once, maybe, but in the end, after the lesser guides  
have fallen short of their promises:

In the darkness, maybe: not turning to me until you have  
tried all the others and not got what you wanted: not  
until then:

Hating to do it, resenting me still, resisting to the last, yet  
undeniably needing me:

Calling my name in reluctant faith, holding yourself back  
yet summoning me—

Perhaps despising me still, perhaps making less instead of  
more of me still,

Yet hungry, thirsty: pressed to the verge: delaying no more  
—crying aloud for me:

Not knowing who I am or what I mean, yet crying for me:  
in wretchedness and despair invoking my aid:

You, all of you, my sisters and brothers, in whom here now  
as you see me I excite only laughter and scorn.

Everybody has had something to say to you—everybody has  
taken you in hand:

The little have had much to say to you and the big have  
had little to say to you:

And they have said things to you out of laws and books and  
the past,

And they have said things to you out of armies and navies  
where men are enemies and fight,

And they have said things to you out of parlors and offices  
and out of vast incomes,

And they have said things to you in the name of dead relig-  
ions and buried humanities,

And they have said things in the script of alien arts testify-  
ing on empty sheets of paper:

They have said these things to you: these things and more:  
and yet you stand around waiting for something still  
unsaid:

Something, you dont know what: something not in all their  
glittering parade:

Something left out of the figures, left out of the great houses  
and affairs:

Something preciously necessary yet totally forgotten: what-  
ever it is, it alone being real and sure:

Something answering the call of life and love: from the  
unfathomable deeps answering: from courage and sac-  
rifice answering:

Something which the masters have missed—something  
which is nowhere in their catalogues and formulas:

Something which the body may skip and property may skip  
but which the soul cant skip:

Something, something, something.

Something, something, something:

I do not know: maybe I make too much of myself: maybe I  
dont weigh as much as I think:

But somehow it seems to be my turn now: after patiently  
waiting, seems to be my turn:

Now that the others are through it is about time for me to  
begin:

I too having something to say to you—the things maybe  
that you most need and have been waiting for: with-  
out knowing it, have been waiting for:

Things not out of their laws and their books and their  
shows and their armies:

Things not out of their fames and their flatteries and elo-  
quent in the life of the great:

No: but things out of hearts—things out of my heart: things  
out of my love:

Things out of the days I have lived: things out of being a  
success and being a failure:

Things out of my passion and out of my stumbling efforts  
to see and to grow:

Such things: O dear ones: my very tissue, my very blood,  
my very inmost unravelings of shame:

Such things, O dear ones: pouring from me into you: sorry  
things, glad things, out of my faltering days:

Things made least of: things I make most of: things that  
are brushed aside by the elect:

These, these, I bring you, O dear ones: these you wait for:  
these you cry and laugh for:

These things of my body giving up life for you: these  
things of my soul giving up death for you:

These things coming to you after everything else has come  
to you,

As I coming to you come only after everyone else has come  
to you,

Not begging for favors, not claiming anything either, just simply placing everything I have at your feet:

Everything I have, my adored ones, you men and women who suffer:

Little though it is, just everything I have, answering your cry: everything I have:

Something, something, something.

I too have something to say to you, O dear ones: I too have something to say:

And it will be best for you to listen to me: I bring that which all the others have made of no account:

And though I do not talk in pretty phrases to suit you you will find me useful anyhow:

It is no accident when I come to you in my usual clothes and make my usual speech:

I don't want to outrage the others but I want to honor myself and you:

And so I am satisfied to be as I am even if that is to be very little indeed:

Rather than to be as some one else is even if that is to be very big indeed:

For I have not arrived with my arms full and my heart full of nice phrases and palsyng joys:

No: far from that: I come suffocated with love—with simple everyday love:

And that love I must let out—that love belongs to you and I am here to deliver it—

Though you reject me, though you destroy me, I come to deliver that love:

You will take it or not as you choose or as you must, I am here to deliver it:

To deliver it in new poems, in new scriptures and in new trades,

Putting away all the barbarisms to make room for this simple charge out of my tortured dream:  
To deliver my love to you—to deliver myself: my body,  
my soul—to deliver them:  
I too have something to say to you.

### YOU CANNOT DECEIVE ME

You cannot deceive me, you who bring me your songs—  
I am not deceived by your rhymes and your formulas,  
I am not deceived by your worship of the masters and the traditions:  
I see that after all your songs do not sing,  
I see that after all your songs are counterfeit songs,  
You cannot resurrect your dead soul in the rhythms of a false beauty:  
There is death in your songs—it looks at me with staring eyes.

You cannot deceive me, you who are God:  
I am not deceived when I see the evil of God,  
I am not deceived when I see the cruelty of God,  
I am not deceived when I see the hypocrisy of God,  
I am not deceived when I see the godlessness of God:  
I am not deceived, I follow the compensating trail,  
After every journey I arrive beyond God at God's foothold.

You cannot deceive me, you who are the virtuous of the world—  
I have tried your virtues by virtue and found they would not answer the cries of the lost.  
You cannot deceive me, you who are the vicious of the world—

I see something back of your vice which purifies and persuades me.

Do you think I am led off the inevitable scent by the cry of injustice?

Do you think I wilfully lose myself in the tangle of iniquity?

I dig my fingers in the ground and pull up the roots and I see that they are all sound.

You cannot deceive me, you who may be contrary among men:

I take the nebulous bad deed and fashion it into a good world.

Do you think I do not see the hand that will save back of the hand that will damn?

Do you not think I can feel that life answers death every time?

Yes, life answers death every time—

The flower answers the seed every time,

The roof answers the foundation every time,

The good answers the bad every time,

Success answers failure every time,

Justice answers injustice every time,

Gladness answers sorrow every time.

You cannot deceive me, you who tie yourselves to the ground:

All mounts up and up and up forever—without resistance up and up:

A louder cry of good always answers the loudest cry of evil.

You cannot deceive me, you who prepare the world for sorrow,

You cannot deceive me, you who prepare the world for injustice,

You cannot deceive me, you who prepare the world for  
dishonor and death,

You cannot deceive me, you who say love will not finally  
count,

You cannot deceive me, you who prepare for retreat and  
surrender.

I do not prepare for retreat and surrender—

I prepare the world's joy for your sorrow,

I prepare the world's justice for your injustice,

I prepare the world's honor and life for your dishonor and  
death,

I prepare the world for love that will finally count in place  
of the love that will not finally count,

I prepare the world for eternal advance and conquest in  
place of retreat and surrender:

That is what it means when you are shocked by the noise I  
make and puzzled by the words I speak,

That is what it means when I say that you cannot deceive  
me.

## WHO SHALL GIVE THAT HOUR TO WORDS?

Who shall give that hour to words?

Who shall come from the closet and give its prayer to  
words?

Who shall come from the bed of the bride and give its  
heaven to words?

Who shall come from the wrestle of self with self and give  
the battle to words?

Who shall love and despair or love and believe and give  
despair and belief to words?

Who shall drag the heart to the surface by words and leave  
it there to die?

Who shall tear the root from the earth and expect the tree  
to live?

Who shall give that hour to words?

When tried by the test of words life is bound to fail:

The songs tried by the test of words no longer sing,

The picture tried by the test of words loses all light and  
shade,

The skill of the worker tried by the test of words is dead  
and inert,

The lofty mountains tried by the test of words sink to dead  
levels,

The great men tried by the test of words are lost in the  
jostling crowd,

The affections tried by the test of words shiver in the out-  
door cold:

When tried by the test of words life is bound to fail.

I cry to life when tried by the test of words: Run!

I cry to the poet when tried by the test of words: Go back  
to your poem!

I cry to the singer when tried by the test of words: Go back  
to your song!

I cry to the lover when tried by the test of words: Go back  
to your love!

I cry to the artist when tried by the test of words: Go back  
to your art!

The test of words kills, forever kills:

Nothing survives the test of words, not the smallest particle  
of life:

I cry to life when tried by the test of words: Run!

Words betray, words are stained red with precious human  
blood;

Words lure you to adventure and then abandon you in the  
sight of triumph,  
Words promise you beautiful results and abandon you in the  
sight of heaven,  
Words promise you love and abandon you in the sight of  
fruition,  
Words promise you heroism and abandon you in the sight  
of the battle,  
Words promise you worship and abandon you in the sight  
of the shrine,  
Words promise you justice and abandon you in the sight of  
the commune:  
Words betray, words are stained red with precious human  
blood.

Words that fall short of life:  
The words of the book that fall short of the book,  
The words of love that fall short of love,  
The words of simple speech falling short of the simplest  
speech,  
Always lagging behind, always coming along late,  
Always claiming the booty, always clamoring for the re-  
ward—  
Words not capital, only the tables of capital:  
Words that fall short of life.

Words, words, forever the clamor of words:  
Words are but signatures with which life declares its  
humors,  
Words may run the errands of life, working for the wages  
of life,  
Words never lead the soul, words always follow the soul,  
Words are the appeal and the record but life is the hand  
that writes.

Are you afraid of words? do you shrink before the militant  
array of words?

Do not be awed by words, do not retreat before words or  
surrender to words,

Words are only words—you can do without them, you can  
do with them,

Words are only words—they could not do without you, they  
can only do with you:

Words, words, forever the clamor of words.

Who shall give that hour to words?

That hour of the last confession of the soul to the soul?

That hour of the last surrender of the flesh to the flesh?

That hour of holiest resolution when words have come into  
court and confessed words bankrupt?

That hour of consummating love when love withholds  
nothing from love?

That hour of confirming reverence when all the body and  
all the soul of man is prostrate before the lordship of  
life?

That hour that you know, that I know, that words can  
never know?

That hour of the ripeness of fruit and of those who freely  
eat?

That crowning hour of ecstasy in which lovers stand in the  
fullest light of passion and possession:

Who shall give that hour to words?

## MY PLAIN SONG IS NOT HEARD

My plain song is not heard:

It lifts its simple cadence in love and benediction,

It travels the usual ways in the usual dress of men—

Like the river it keeps to its natural course and is not re-  
marked,  
And like the clouds it is driven here and there obediently  
to its law—  
But the masters pass it by hearing nothing or resenting  
what they hear,  
And the echoers of the masters pass it by because the mas-  
ters ignore or reject the unaccustomed note,  
And so though it does not stop singing it sings mainly to  
itself  
And is joyful within itself and sufficient and looks for no  
return.

And yet my song is heard because I hear it with my own  
ears,  
And it is answered because I respond to it in my days and  
nights of love,  
And it flies far because it is pledged to keep up with my  
ideals,  
And it sings true because it adds my laughter to my tears in  
one total of joy,  
And that is enough because honesty is always enough,  
And that is enough because not being known is always  
enough,  
And so though I sing forever and I alone hear my song  
I am audience enough and I cheer my journey with sweet  
acclaim.

Did I say no one hears my song?  
I guess I should not say that: my song too has its answerers,  
But my answerers are not priests who make the creeds of  
song,  
Nor are they the sleek or the comfortable or the wary:  
They are the people who are as plain as my song,

They are the average men and women who do not rate  
themselves very high:

They hear me, a few of them, and take me to heart—

They catch up my words and pass them around and make  
friends of them.

The man who is picking coal in a mine—he listens, he  
hears some echo underground, he cant account for it:

The woman tending a loom is startled by my familiar sa-  
lute: she stops her loom to make sure of my message:

The engineer in his place in the train dashing on feels  
himself mysteriously summoned:

The mother worried by her small children halts in the mid-  
dle of a sentence to catch me as I pass:

I sound up and down the streets my simple cry of aspira-  
tion:

Heads are pushed out of windows to see who I am and why  
I call:

The little boys playing marbles recognize and acknowledge  
me and go on with their game whistling and happy:

So it seems that after all there are some reasons for my song,  
And though no one could say why some do faintly hear and  
gladly listen:

The unlettered hear and listen and slaves in distress hear  
and listen,

The wronged hear and derelicts who hope for better times  
hear and listen,

And I who am not accepted by teachers who give out prizes  
and diplomas,

And I who am not invited to shed luster on state occasions  
with my song,

I am hailed as the voice of populations which but for me  
would go unnamed,

I am hailed as the loyal witness of improved codes and  
juster laws,

I am hailed as the courier and promise of social regeneration:

I whom nobody hears, I whom a few gladly hear,  
Wandering between houses and across fields and hills singing my songs the best I can,  
Not worried so long as I make use of my own voice and follow my own feet,  
Drilled not by schools and traditions but in the stern clash of revolt,  
I, not remembered, not forgotten, treated as an alien, yet haunting the world with my rhythms,  
Lavish on the crowd the richest treasure of time.

The President sits high in the state and does not hear me,  
The general tearing about on horseback issuing noisy orders to his troops does not hear me,  
The professor teaching dead arts to his live classes does not hear me,  
The editor taking the lead in following public opinion does not hear me,  
The merchant and the lawyer who mix best with worst in barter and logic do not hear me,  
And so for all the great and all the prosperous I would go unheard,  
But the tramp dusty and tired in the road—he hears me,  
But the workman wronged and browbeaten at his toil—he hears me,  
But the poorly clothed people and people underfed—they hear me,  
But the dreaming boy and girl badly starting out in life—they hear me,  
But I who listen and am so much in love with my own voice—I hear myself,  
And all that seems to me to be quite enough,

No matter for the applause of office and grandeur seems to  
me to be quite enough,  
The sufferers and the humble hearing me quite enough,  
And I hearing myself quite enough,  
Though as I match my fate with the fate of the chosen  
My plain song is not heard.

### THE SAYERS OF WORDS HAVE SAID

The sayers of words have said the last word:  
They have shut the doors, they have closed the shutters,  
they have put out the lights:  
The sayers of words have said: Now there shall be no  
more speech, now the world may sleep.

I come in the dead of its night and challenge the world to  
meet a new day:  
I say I the waker have come to start where the sleepers left  
off:  
I make a great noise, I arouse the world to the turmoil of  
the busy streets,  
I bring the world fresh sorrow and fresh joy—it must drink  
of both to the full:  
I will not let the last word pass forever and forever,  
I will meet the last word with a first word forever and for-  
ever:  
Up, dear world, there is more for you to do!

Yes, dear world, there is more for you to do:  
Let the sayers of words sleep, let the last word rest in its  
coffin—we will do without them.  
Have all the trees been planted in the ground? I will plant  
more trees.

Has all the love of the world been told about? I will tell  
about more love.

I do not quarrel with those who have stopped, I only keep on:  
I see that I can do over again all that has been done and  
more too,

I see that I am not barren—that I may be as good a begin-  
ning as any,

I see that it would be ridiculous if Socrates and Jesus came  
for something and I came for nothing,

I see that the whole purpose of the world would be defeated  
if the last word of the dead sayers of words was of  
more importance than the first word of a living sayer  
of words:

Therefore I go about my business with great serenity of  
spirit,

In the midst of the jeers of the crowd and the contempt of  
authorities go about calm and convinced of myself,

In the face of currents that set the other way stick to my  
course sure of the successful issue,

In the teeth of advice keep sweetly to the path of my own  
counsel,

When my friends are afraid of me and my parents tell me  
they are sorry they gave me birth and I am alone, oh  
so much alone, on the earth, go about in great comfort  
of conviction.

Shall I give up because the dead sayers of words have given  
up?

Now is the time for me to be steadfast in the loyalties of  
the living sayer of words.

I hear the lesson that is taught but the lesson does not teach  
me,

I do not take my lesson from the book that is handed me  
by the teacher:

They all tell me to look and listen back, so I may see life  
and hear life in the visions of the dead sayers of words.  
The guide loses his place among the graves of the dead:  
I am left alone with the problem—left alone to learn the  
lesson in the quick of the voyage.  
I do not look back—I look around, the passion of my daily  
life possesses me:  
I do not listen back—I hear words spoken by living lips as  
words have never been spoken by men before:  
I call my companions, I am heard, we meet and embrace.

The world sleeps deep, the world sleeps late:  
The sayers of words who have said the last word—they are  
closed forever in their own house by their own hands:  
I have gone to meet the dawn, I am crying the cry of the  
first word:  
The world will hear me in time and not complain:  
The sleepers may growl but the wakers will welcome me  
gladly.  
Has all been said to the day that is gone?  
All has been said: yes. Shall I then be silent forever?  
No: I will be ready to say it all over again to the day that  
is about to break:  
All the justice and love, all the ideals and dreams, over  
again:  
Say it with the vehemence and faith of the first word: say  
it again and again until the noonday hears and acknowl-  
edges me.

The sayers of words have said the last word:  
They have shut the doors, they have closed the shutters,  
they have put out the lights:  
The sayers of words have said: Now there shall be no more  
speech, now the world may sleep.

I come in the dead of its night and challenge the world to  
meet a new day.

## THAT IS WHAT THE SONG MEANT TO ME

That is what the song meant to me:

It translated the language of my own heart back to my heart  
again,

It translated the language of my own soul back to my soul  
again,

It made my meanings clear to myself when I thought I was  
lost in the mazes of my own incapacity,

It was melody doing the work which reason had failed to  
do and logic had failed to do,

It was that thing in me being at last said which for so long  
had refused to speak in its own behalf.

The leaf of the tree that was blown by the wind said to the  
wind:

You have told me the meanings of myself as I could not  
tell them alone.

The wave of the sea that was hurried up the shore said to  
the shore:

You have told me the meanings of myself as I never could  
have told them alone.

I heard the song, it visited me in sacred places:

The song danced itself in glad echoes through the last in-  
timacies of my soul,

The song dirged itself in deep sorrow through the farthest  
centers of my spirit:

The song meant one thing to me when I hated,

The song meant one thing to me when I loved:

Satan came to me in a song and appointed a day for lamen-  
tation,

God came to me in a song and appointed a day for praise.  
The song meant to me that which I meant to myself:  
When I mean ugliness to myself the song is ugly,  
When I mean beauty to myself the song is beautiful:  
I have killed life in a song and thrown dirt into its grave,  
I have resurrected life in a song and sent it perfected into  
the ceaseless future.  
The song is not for itself—oh! not for itself!  
The song is not for the instruments of the great orchestra—  
oh not for them:  
The song is for me—just for me—as I sit in the great hall  
in the crowd and listen,  
It is addressed just to me—to a single person—to me.  
The man who wrote it away somewhere in another world  
back a day or two in another time,  
Wrote it for me, prophetically singling me out by an in-  
stinct to be his auditor and incorporate his song in my  
life.

What did the song mean to me?

I crossed the river in a boat: what did the song mean to  
me?

I met a woman I love on the street: what did the song  
mean to me?

I took a baby in my arms, it looked up in my face and  
cooed: what did the song mean to me?

I sunk money in the market, we gambled and I lost: what  
did the song mean to me?

I was a revolutionist, I fought on the barricades for lib-  
erty: what did the song mean to me?

I starved in a garret trying to be faithful to my work: what  
did the song mean to me?

I grieved my friends, I was an outcast, my words were  
sin to the scornful: what did the song mean to me?

I was a criminal in the dock, they found me guilty, I was  
sent to jail: what did the song mean to me?

God the father up somewhere called to me the son down  
here, I answered yes: what did the song mean to me?

In the walk of heaven and the walk of hell, in all contrasts  
of loss and gain: what did the song mean to me?

My way was dark with the darkness of its sloth: what did  
the song mean to me?

My way was sunny with the sunshine of busy service: what  
did the song mean to me?

I stand awed before my own unanswerable questions, wor-  
shipping much, saying nothing:

What did the song mean to me?

What did the song mean to me?

The song did not mean something played by the master's  
orchestra,

The song did not mean something which came to me off  
the baton of the leader,

The song did not mean the grand harmonies of the com-  
poser—and they were very grand,

The song did not mean something the critics told me about  
in a book,

The song did not mean something I read of the song in the  
life of its author,

The song did not mean a faraway dream of the man in  
whose name it is put on the programs:

The song meant my life—the daily round of my innocent  
and guilty life,

The song meant my life—the common dirt out of which  
my life springs on the way to God.

The summoner when he wrote it knew well enough that  
there would be just such a man as me around to hear  
and answer,

He saw my face, he felt my faster beating heart, he counted  
my hurrying pulse,  
He skipped all the years between and all the people and  
came straight to me,  
In all the surrender and all the conquest of my life came  
straight to me,  
So that as I sat there, just one person in the big crowd,  
So that as I sat there, just in an ordinary seat, looking like  
all the rest,  
He came to me direct, laid his hand on my arm, kissed my  
lips with his lips and went away complacent and up-  
lifted,  
Joyously confessing that the song and the master of the song  
had met and paid their immortal debt.

The leader dropped his baton for the last time—the orches-  
tra was adjourned, the song was still, the compact be-  
tween us was sealed forever.

I sat alone in the crowd, I withdrew from the great hall  
with my precious burden:  
That is what the song meant to me.

### WHILE THE ORCHESTRA PLAYS YOU, MIGHTY SYMPHONY

While the orchestra plays you, mighty symphony,  
While the masters and critics are debating what you mean,  
I stand here and there listening and I say nothing.  
I do not know what you mean but I like you—  
You fill me with life and I cannot explain life but I am  
satisfied.  
(Or do I fill you with life and is that the secret)?

I do not know that I would be much better off, or any, if I  
could tell what you mean:

I have such joy in you I do not ask the meaning of joy,  
I receive such inspiration from you I do not ask the mean-  
ing of inspiration.

I know that the sun is bountiful but I also know that you  
are bountiful:

The sun up there in the heavens is hot with fire—but the  
fire is not the meaning of the sun,

Your soul is ablaze with passion—but passion is not the  
meaning of your soul:

Back of all meanings I can see with the quarrelers is the  
meaning of peace which eludes definition,

Back of the meaning of the day lit by the sun is another  
meaning which lights the sun itself.

I do not understand you—you do not come to me to explain  
and I ask nothing:

I do not seem to want to know—I seem to find my ignor-  
ance knowledge enough

While the masters and critics debate and the orchestra  
plays you, mighty symphony.

### THE GREAT POETS REVEALED

The great poets revealed the confidences of the muse,  
The great musicians made melodious the harsh accents of  
the quarreling world,

The great orators were lips to the betrayed humanities and  
converted dead saws and axioms into sweet cries for  
justice,

The great painters turned sorrow and gladness into color  
and rallied upon the dead canvas the dispersed dreams  
of defeat,

The great doctors rescued life from disease,  
The great mothers died for their thankless and thankful  
children,  
The great soldiers perished in the madness of battle believing  
that righteousness found its seal in their blood,  
The great children were faithful to the decrepit and accepted  
sweetly the parent tyrannies,  
The great reformers put all earth in their fires and purified it.  
Before all these my lifted voice confessed my humiliation,  
Towards all these I cried for busy men to stop from work-a-  
day slaveries and look,  
I acclaimed their names everywhere, I took all other words  
and deeds away and left only theirs:  
So had they convinced me, so had they fixed in the accidental  
day the stars of their destinies.  
But after my satisfied heart had grown strong doing this  
penance,  
I myself, reincarnated, discovered my own renown—  
Heard great poems, songs, orations, more piercing, undeniable,  
competing within for province,  
The painters mixing immortal colors out of my personal  
experience, the doctors healing, the darling mothers  
patient to the end, and soldiers heroic, children filial  
and reformers prophetic:  
These mine, fragments of me, voicing me, expressing the  
frame my body and the love my soul,  
These, not greater or less, but mine, not seeking by comparison  
the gifts of the judge,  
These, not great to the world, not great to me, but fitting  
me better than the great,  
These, demanding the prior right and the final word.

## TO YOU, GOING OR COMING, O WOMAN

You shrink affrighted when I boldly strike the strings of your own heart which you have always feared to strike for yourself—for that is all that I have done :

I have heard that melody in you which you have not heard in yourself, I have listened awed: I have not dared until now to say anything lest speech might somehow jar the song you unknowing poured into my treasuring soul:

Now you are prepared for yourself and being prepared for yourself are prepared for others :

Therefore we may travel the round earth together and make of all the scattered musical threads one strand,

Evoking the majestic choral.

A little woman with a little truth, a little woman only a few feet high,  
triumphant, lights the way:

A vast state with a vast lie, a vast state filling the space between two  
oceans, defeated, blocks the way:

A little dream with a little torch flames across the earth forever:

A vast obstruction with a vast mistake, standing before it, throws a  
shadow for a day.

## TO YOU, GOING OR COMING, O WOMAN

To you, going or coming, O woman, I pass the key of love:  
Take it: it will open all doors: go where you choose:

I put no bounds on the privilege of love.

I do not make you pretty speeches or flatter you with lying  
poems:

I may be rather brusque with you and you may not like my  
manners at all.

That wont hurt: the chief thing is subserved: I like you: I  
bequeath freedom to you.

And that, it seems to me, is better than all the humbug  
rhymes of poets,

And that, it seems to me, is more honor to woman than  
any amount of verbal adoration—

And maybe has more art in its truth than the polishers of  
phrases would admit.

I dont go down on my knees to you—I meet you face to  
face—

And the kisses of your dear lips are not goddess nectars to  
me but the precious gifts of a simple comrade.

There is that about you, O woman, which gives and takes  
life with prodigal unconcern:

You blossom and flower and give yourself to man and keep  
back nothing—

When you give you give all and you regret nothing that you  
give,

When you love you love all and you suspect nothing that  
you love,

And though a man is richer than all the planets because of  
what you bestow upon him,

He is poorer than twenty bankrupt nothings because of  
what you pay him as a tax.

I will not go back on you, I mean exactly what I say:

It is easy to address deft speeches to you and amorous songs,  
But I come to you when you call—come with my body,  
come with my soul,

And I let you alone when you reject me—in flesh and spirit  
let you alone.

I don't want to lose you: I love you: but you will not stay:

I would not send you off, I would not hold you here:

What love cannot retain cannot be retained—must freely  
depart.

You go where your love goes: where else should you go?

And your sacred body so softly aloof to the touch goes  
where love goes: otherwise it goes to hell.

You leave: my eyes follow you: yet I would not curb the  
impulse that leads you elsewhere:

If love cannot hold you here how could a legislature or a  
document hold you here?

Woman, I set you free:

I do not hold you by any bond,

No book put in the scales against you weighs an ounce,

Any custom quoted to scare you should be laughed at:

No father creed can stand in place of the child ideal.

They are afraid that if you go right—by love's right—the  
world will go wrong,

That if you live according to love something will happen to  
property and order.

They call upon you to come back—to be like the rest:

To lie, conform, sell your body out for cash, like the rest,  
and be usual and genteel.

Now, if love has grown imperious I will make it reasonable  
again:

And the body, if it behaves badly to the soul, must be reminded of its place and not go beyond—

And the soul, if it behaves badly to the body, must be reminded of its place and not go beyond.

To you, going or coming, O woman:

A man can only say a few things to you and then be still—

A few man things which may fall short of the woman's mark:

But the man can say he loves and let you go,

And the man can help you to go as he irresistibly attracted you when you came,

And he can now efface himself and let love alone arbitrate the solemn issue,

And keep the stars out of the way and the sun and the ocean immensities to give you room to be free:

That is what I feel like saying to you, sternly, tenderly, without trying to be smart or ornamental:

To you, going or coming, O woman!

## BEFORE TIME WAS WOMAN

Before time was woman,

She brought the first day out of the day that was not first,  
She was couched in motherhood and reaffirmed in her child  
and matched to virile delight.

Before space was woman,

Out of her distance came and habitable worlds and men  
who gave the earth its dreams.

Forthcoming, forthcoming,

Always giving her due to the hungering soil,

Always renewing the ever unappeased laws,

Always renowned, yet not always free,

Always revered, yet not always respected,  
The unaccomplished ideal in her completeness ratified.

Who shall remove the veil from woman?  
Who shall break the clouds before her radiant eyes?  
Who shall be foremost to affront the dulled senses of her  
ancient slavemasters?  
Who shall give woman to her child, in free treaty sanctioned?

The dream of woman grants suffrage to life and joy.  
When you speak of your law woman shudders:  
When you speak of your passion woman is humbled:  
When you speak of your duty woman disdains:  
When you speak of your love woman loves.  
The hand that removes her veil will abolish chivalry forever:

It will be a man's ungloved hand, or her own, bearing no  
lace or flag.

Though you worshiped her face you worshiped it behind a  
cloud.

Now you may still worship, but you must worship as an  
equal born,

Conceding the august compact.

WHAT DO I MEAN TO YOU, O WOMAN,  
O MAN?

What do I mean to you, O woman, O man?  
It means much to me, what I mean to you:  
It means most to me what I am to myself, but it means no  
small thing to me what I am to you:  
And if I mean anything good to myself that does not mean  
good equally to you,

And if I lose the fertile meanings of all in the sterile meanings of one,

Then I miss the main point: then my soul goes begging: then I am without excuse:

For the strength of a man and the excuse of a man is in his meanings:

And the meanings of a man are not the meanings of his value to himself but of his value to the crowd:

At least, that's the way the whole matter looks to me: that's the way:

And so I ask questions of my soul and ask questions of you, O woman, O man:

And much depends upon what I answer, what you answer: much and all:

In the days when things go right or wrong, much depends: in victory or defeat, much and all depends and must depend everywhere and always.

What do I mean to you, O woman?

I am the key and I unlock you: I mean the key to you, O woman:

I have thought that the key to a woman is a man and could be nothing else:

I have thought that the key to a man is a woman and could be nothing else:

Perhaps a certain woman or a certain man: perhaps you or me:

Perhaps there is one key or perhaps there are many keys: woman or women, man or men:

I have felt jubilant like the opener of life—like the mouth-piece of sex and emancipation:

As if, O woman, I had led you to the edge of a new world and left you there to go in or to turn back as you freely chose:

I dont know how it comes about: I cant explain it at all: I dont feel guilty or innocent: but that's how it seems to me.

How does it seem to you, O woman?—do you turn back or do you pass joyfully over, O woman?

What do I bring you, O woman, in my full arms, in my full heart?

Is it something you want to throw away or something you want to keep?

I say to you, O you one woman of all women—you woman complete of my incomplete soul and body:

I am the key to you: I unlock you: you go free from this minute:

I alone make you free—I alone am competent: now you will know what I mean, what love means, what life means, what you yourself mean:

I have turned the key in the lock: the prisoner passes out ecstatically to the light of day:

I have turned the key in the lock: the prisoner is reprieved —my beloved—the woman: you, O complete woman:

I who deliver being also delivered: I who give also taking: I who waive all debts also going free of debt.

What do I mean to you, O man?

Do I stand hidden behind phrases passing pretty compliments that lead nowhere?

Or am I found in your midst with a helping hand going where you go?

When you see love at work in the world are you reminded of me?

When your little hope grows suddenly big in the increasing light do you think of my prophecy?

When some joy you never knew before leaps in your blood do you repeat my name?

When justice comes to take the place of injustice, the  
friend taking the place of the enemy, am I visible to  
you?

Much depends upon that, O man: much and all: victory or  
defeat:

For nothing however glorious is victory if it fails to take  
you along with it:

And nothing however sorrowful is defeat if it includes and  
is fair to you.

I see so well that the vastness of the universe is not in end-  
less space and the stars but in their meanings:

I see so well that my measure is not in my body or in my  
soul but in my meanings:

And for that reason, O man, I stand before you acquitted  
or convicted,

And you will sentence me to life or sentence me to death  
according as my meanings mean life or death to you:

There is no other way in or out: according as my mean-  
ings mean life or death to you, O man!

I wander on abandoned feet: I go far east or west: I disap-  
pear in vanishing distances:

I get out of the horizon of the people: I pass into oblivion:  
I try to escape my memories:

But I have seen the crowd: I have looked it in the face: I  
can no longer refuse its cry:

The fear that drove me away drags me back: the voice that  
banished me recalls me:

So here I am again, in the streets, in the alleys, choked in  
the stormy stream:

My meanings were not removed somewhere, in the woods,  
on the shore, where good luck forgets:

My meanings were right here, in the town, where the poor  
suffer and die, where bad luck remembers:

My meanings are not in the elegant enemic sayso of books  
but in the virile vile give and take of the struggle:

I have tried to drown my sorrows in words: I have turned  
my sorrows over to art and the dictionary:

But my sorrows are not less keen: they dog my steps: they  
forestall my baffled will:

Nothing in the swing and the certainty of the earth is effi-  
cient but love, O woman, O man!

Words are not efficient, pictures and music are not efficient:  
love alone is efficient:

And so, O woman, O man, you will take my love and un-  
tangle its meanings:

And you will set me up or down not because the prosperous  
and the flattered of the earth take off their hats and  
their shoes to me:

You will set me up or down because the poor and the fail-  
ures of the earth understand my brother meanings and  
keep me close by.

What do I mean to you, O woman, O man?

Take me aside with you—take me with you to some place  
where you are nearest your own meanings:

Do not judge me by what I wear, not even by what I say:  
judge me by what I stir up in you:

By what I stir up in your body when your body is nearest  
giving the body its due:

By what I stir up in your soul when your soul is nearest  
giving the soul its due:

By what I stir up in your hushed dreams which you never  
have dared tell to any confessor:

I stand before you, O woman, O man, to be judged—to  
have my meanings passed upon: to be sentenced to life  
or death:

What do I mean to you, O woman, O man?

## UNTIL NOW THE FLESH

Until now the flesh has not been at home in the universe,  
Until now the flesh has been looked upon as born out of  
wedlock,  
Until now the flesh has been veiled and quoted against the  
universe,  
It has been obliged to sneak through the world, to take its  
chances in the shadows,  
It has been compelled to serve and suffer but has not been  
allowed a voice,  
It was even the butt while the shield of the spirit, it took  
the blows of the spirit,  
Yet it was forever forbidden, was forever denied its rank,  
dispossessed of its properties:  
The flesh, the holy flesh, the mother flesh of man, the  
father flesh of woman,  
Clean, washed sacredly clean, in the infallible economy of  
birth.

The flesh contains the best of love and gives the best of love,  
The flesh offers itself all, and first offers itself and last offers  
itself,  
The flesh is signed for by the attributes of heaven and the  
attributes of hell,  
The flesh is the bridgeway by which the spirit passes on-  
ward to fruition,  
The flesh is reverent and worships when and where the  
spirit worships:  
What would you give for the universe if it had two places  
for worship?  
Where should the flesh worship but with the spirit?  
The flesh is that which maddens love and that which re-  
strains love.

What did the flesh ever do to you that you say such hard things about it?

What is love for if not for the flesh and what is flesh for if not for love?

They were afraid to touch you, flesh, afraid and afraid:

I take you in my arms, I journey the full journey with you, not taking off a single step:

If I could not honor you who are flesh I could not honor you who are spirit,

If I was sorry for the ecstasies of the flesh I would be sorry for the ecstasies of the spirit,

If I was to sneak to the flesh and ask for its pleasures in the dark I would sneak to the spirit and ask for its pleasures in the dark.

If a man touches me or a woman touches me flesh reports to flesh in the sacred language of love:

If a man gives me that which is wholly his and mine to give and take or if a woman gives me that which is wholly hers and mine to give and take,

If something words could not tell about possesses me and the lords god appear in the habit of the flesh,

If something, I do not know what, belongs to me from you,  
O woman,

If something, I do not know what, belongs to me from you,  
O man,

If the darling and imperative flesh assumes the mysterious errand of interchange,

Shall I cry out against the perfecting flesh and call upon the universe to save the flesh from itself?

So far the banished flesh has not been at home in the universe,

Motherhood has not been at home, fatherhood has not been  
at home,  
The children playing their games have not been at home,  
The thrill that passes into me when I touch your body has  
not been at home,  
The kisses of men and women have not been at home,  
The embracings and longings and sacrificed desires have not  
been at home,  
The hunger of the body for the body has not been at home,  
All has been alien, all has been degraded and soiled:  
Until now the flesh, standing up and accusing the spirit,  
Until now the flesh, coming out of the shadows, remaining  
in the open, fully avowing itself,  
The flesh, the holy flesh, the mother flesh of man, the  
father flesh of woman,  
Records its inalienable birthright.

### THE SACRED BODY OF MY LOVE

The sacred body of my love,  
Equal mate of an equal mate in perfect union blended,  
So long so scorned by every trifling scoffer,  
Beaten by whips of cords and whips of tongues,  
The outcast wanderer banned by monkish gods and puritan  
men,  
Givers so damned, so blushed about yet so hungered for,  
At last sets up for itself the claim of noblest origin,  
And calls upon the doubting world to hear.

O sacred body of my love!  
Let me avow you in words that will be understood:  
Do not let me stand back and say nothing while the re-  
vilers persecute you.

I do not come to you with pretty words but with speechless  
adoration,

I do not intimate you in occult rhythms but cry out your  
name in neighborly accents:

Do not mistake my unquailing adhesion, O sacred body of  
my love!

I am not veiling you in disguises of goddesses and gods and  
dim figures of mythologic lore,

I quote you in the lives of men and women who live in my  
own day and street.

If I could be ashamed of my father and mother I could be  
ashamed of you,

And if I could be ashamed of the darling partnership of  
lovers I could be ashamed of you,

And if I could say the body is not equal to the soul I would  
have to say the soul is not equal to the body: I could  
not otherwise understand either:

And if I went back on you, O sacred body of my love, I  
would have to go back on you, O sacred soul of my  
love,

For when the body is clean body and soul are one in holi-  
ness,

And when the soul is clean soul and body are one in holi-  
ness,

And I can see no reason why I should be frank about the  
soul and be afraid to be frank about the body,

For if either one is less worth while than the other then  
God has monstrously blundered.

I wash my mind out before I dream anything about you, O  
sacred spirit of my love,

And I wash my mouth out before I say anything about you,  
O sacred body of my love,

And I address you, O my body, in the last fond epithets of  
surrender that everybody may hear,

And if there are ears to which the sound of my glad approval is unpleasant let them be stuffed with ascetic scripture,

For I am determined to talk only in such a way as will not mislead your enemies,

And I will not apologize and will withdraw nothing,

No more than I will apologize for my dear children or withdraw them.

The time has come for us to square accounts with the body,  
The time has come for us to acknowledge that no one can be honest with the soul who is not honest with the body,

And that if the universe dont mean right by the body it has no chance left to mean right by the soul

I am tired of the songs and philosophies of the pausers and sappers:

They have had their way long enough—they have blasphemed the body long enough:

Now I say we must all gather ourselves on the side of reverence,

Answering with a triumphant yes the questions of the ardent blood,

Refusing hereafter to be consigned to the seedless desert,  
Passing with prodigal benefaction through the passions of the flesh to surpassing harvests,

Lending the body to the spirit in equal value for equal value bestowed.

Let those who must shudder over my bald confession retire:  
Let the mother retire forgetting her son, and the son his mother,

Let the lover retire forgetting his beautiful comrade,  
Let the fruit retire forgetting the seed from which it came,

Let the dear lips we kiss retire and the dear embracing  
arms,  
For now I give it out as my unalterable resolution,  
That the body shall always come in for its share of respect  
and not have to admit impossible sins,  
Because somehow when the best is said of the body better  
cannot be said of the soul,  
And the man or woman who is not prepared to say beautiful  
things about the body is not prepared to say beautiful  
things about the soul:  
O sacred body of my love!

### WHY SHOULD I HOLD BACK, DEAR BODY?

Why should I hold back, dear body?  
I hear many voices, dear body, mingling voices of lust,  
And they do not tell the truth about you:  
Let me speak out, let me tell the truth, I will not make  
more seem less:  
Let me tell what I see but let me avoid the tangled phrases  
of the scholars,  
Let me tell what I see in the virile direct syllables of love:  
The truth about you, dear body, so long misunderstood:  
The truth about you, dear body, so long suborned to base  
uses:  
The truth about you, dear body, made the plaything of law  
and license:  
Let me be seen and listened to—let me break out in words  
of praise of you—  
In the face of profanity let me declare you holy,  
In the face of devils let me declare you god.  
  
I am not afraid to avow you, dear body:

I think that my mother is in my words to give them maternity,  
I think that my children are in my words to take them to the future,  
I think that my lovers are in my words to give them the seedgrains of sex:  
Being so rich, as you dear body are rich, in fulfilling passion,  
And succoring, as you dear body always succor, the paling faith of love:  
And so I can pour out my soul in your interest, dear body, holding nothing back,  
Bringing to the flesh its most exalting suppositions.

Dear body, I take you into my confidence:  
Night and morning it is the same: my love goes out to you,  
And in the unveiling silences my love goes out to you,  
And in words of ingratiating salutation my love goes out to you,  
And you know what it all counts up to and are glad of my love,  
And after I come to you and go you look for me to come again,  
And I say this to you, dear body: I shall not disappoint you:  
I shall not be careless about my engagements with you:  
Men say that the contracts of the body may be broken and no harm done but I say no,  
For I see that with the treaty of the body broken all is broken and love is banished to the desert.

I say to you, woman, who own a woman's body:  
I am full of awe of you because I am able to respond to what you reveal:

I tell myself that the earth and life start and end in you: I  
tell myself how conclusive you are.

I am going to pour you into my cup until it is full and  
drink myself drunk with you,

I am going to dive my deepest into your sea to find out how  
much of ecstasy abides in the divine currents:

Be kind with love, dear body, my darling: you two cannot  
be separated:

Do not reject love when love offers to companion you on  
dangerous journeys:

Be good to love: do not undervalue the fraternity of the  
body:

Think what it means to acknowledge love and obey its  
summons,

Think what it means to recognize your natural leanings and  
hungers,

Think what it means to treat your passions as if the soul  
could not get along without them.

Dear body: you so long denied are coming back to life  
again—

Out of suffering are coming back into joy,

Out of the incomplete are coming back into the complete:

Let me welcome you—with love's kisses welcome you, with  
love's embraces welcome you.

And so your gospel is spoken, dear body:

I am all the time thinking of other things to say to you,

And yet there seems to be only one thing to say to you:

To say love: that is the only thing to say to you: I know  
of nothing else:

To put love into the common air, not to reserve it for  
special places,

To light the very sun with love making it burn with a  
fiercer flame,

To tide the rivers with love overflowing the farms with its  
excess,  
To remind you of love when you forget and to bless you  
with more love when you remember,  
To soften with love the hard luck of the derelict and to  
harden with love the soft luck of the swell,  
To make no yoke or houseling of love or quote it in the  
legislature or the home against the body,  
To demonstrate love without shame wherever I go to a  
woman just as freely as to a man,  
To no longer buy goods across a counter: no: to buy love:  
love will be my coin and purchase,  
To sing love and you, dear body, into my rough songs in-  
stead of velvet tones,  
To write love and you, dear body, into my rebellious  
poems instead of conforming rhymes.

And so in the end it has come to this in my ripened heart,  
dear body:  
When the priest says God I will say Body,  
When the composer says Music I will say Body,  
When the poet says Dream and Rhythm I will say Body,  
When the seer says Justice I will say Body,  
So that you, dear Body, until now outlawed, will come into  
possession of what belongs to you,  
Not seizing or wanting anything that anyone has the right  
to withhold but persuading dissent by the pride of your  
humility,  
You, dear Body, grown supreme in indulgence of lust and  
denial of lust,  
You, dear Body, demanding that I tell the truth about your  
capacities:  
And so in the end it has come to this in my ripened heart,  
dear Body:

That I must be seen and listened to as I break out in praise  
of you, dear Body:  
Why should I hold back, dear Body?

## YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE A BABY

You are going to have a baby:  
That is what you tell me and I listen and look at you.  
Do you know the meaning of that look, you new mother in  
this old world?  
It was a daring challenge for you to issue and for me to  
accept,  
And I repeat it to myself again and again to get its infalli-  
ble measure.  
It is as if a voice out of the potent silences had broken into  
words—  
As if God had said to me: I'm going to put a new star in  
the sky.  
As if God had said to me: I'm going to make another sea  
for you to sail on:  
As if a fresh spring was to burst through the rocks for us to  
drink from:  
As if a virgin bible was to be opened with every phrase of  
it final truth.  
It took me back to the emergence of suns,  
It took me back to the first utterances of religions,  
It took me back to earliest explorations and primary pur-  
poses.  
I was present as the sower scattered the seed in the ground,  
I saw the seed working its way to the harvest fulfilling the  
soil.  
Dear mother! it is no mean affair to have a baby,  
No mean affair to open the divine doors again,

No mean affair to negotiate with God for this gift.  
Every mother is the start of the universe again,  
And is again the first breath of air and the first drop of  
water,  
And submits her life in pawn to space and time for a miracle,  
And recalls to us on these nearer shores the farther treasures.  
And this time it is a mother my dear friend and comrade  
who excites my awe,  
And I go down to the ground to her and swear I honor her  
footprints,  
And I go up to the heavens to her and swear I worship her  
dreamways,  
And I take my place by her side espousing her motherhood,  
And bring her justifying intimations from all the past of the  
soul.

But, you mother, my darling friend, this is not all:  
I bring you love and welcome but this is not all I bring:  
I also bring you warning: I am terrible, too, in stern threatenings:  
And so I lead you into the shadow and tell you what the  
shadow comes to.  
That the shadow often comes to more shadow and destroys,  
That the shadow is poison and hate and disaster and propagates sorrow,  
That the shadow is over you because the sun is over you and  
that you can escape neither,  
For the mother is the mix of both and the child is the mix  
of both,  
And no sun and no shadow can go alone, but they must be  
mixed right,  
And I stick to it that nothing can mix them right but love—  
That property cannot mix them right nor fame nor the customary splendors:

That only love can mix them right—

The love of man for man and of a man for all men:

That love alone can mix them right.

And so I say to you who are a beautiful mother and my  
loyal friend:

Be careful: everything tells in the weave of this strange  
tale:

That all your ancestors infallibly tell and all your compan-  
ions tell,

That your mean thought of your brother tells and your open  
hand tells,

That the hard bargain tells and the jealous thought tells,

That what the father has foully done in business tells for  
foul in the mother womb,

That your denied loves tell for denial and your slave duties  
for slavery,

That the dinner you eat while others starve tells for starva-  
tion,

That all the wrong and right of the past tells, no matter  
how far back,

And that the wrong and right of the day you live in tells,  
no matter whose wrong and right,

And that your share in the social guilt tells and tells for  
guilt in the waiting coming child,

And that however bad it is that the bad all tells it would be  
worse if the bad did not all tell,

And that into the newcomer the litter of eras crowds  
through the channels of your transmuting motherhood,

And that the poison cannot be avoided for the food, hell for  
celestia,

And that the crisis gives you privileges and demands deci-  
sions,

And that though other things tell the mother you tells most  
of all

You are going to have a baby:

Do you hear, O suns and planets—this woman, my friend,  
is going to have a baby:

Do you hear, O eminent big men and women—today is  
your little day: this woman, my friend, is going to  
have a baby:

Do you hear, O arts and sciences—this is your day for going  
to school again: this woman, my friend, is going to  
have a baby:

Let everything be set aside for this crowning deed: let it  
occur without fault:

Let everything wait while this occurs—let the wonderful  
things wait for this thing that is more wonderful to  
occur—

While this parent blaze nurses the twinkle of its offspring.

Dear mother, my friend: the universe is ready for you: it  
makes your bed: it stands round to be used if you need  
it:

You are going to have a baby!

## AND NOW THE BABY IS BORN

And now the baby is born,

And the little mother after the agony and sweat sleeps  
peacefully on her bed,

And the ages old traveler tired after its long journey lies by  
the side of the mother,

And the doctor has gone away into the night to answer  
other calls feeling that his minor part in this major  
drama is over,

And the glad father rests at ease with the world and God  
and his own soul,

And the nurse with a hushed air goes to and fro ministering  
to the needs of the helpless,

And quiet falls on the house and assuages its pitiful fever,  
And all is well with them all after the stir and the doubt.

Now God goes back to the accustomed routine now that  
God has steered this ship warily into port,

Now law resumes its sway now that a miracle has broken  
its rule,

Now other things are happening again after ceasing to hap-  
pen to give the newcomer right of way,

Now the shadows fall thick on the earth and the quarrels of  
peoples are reawakened,

And the river that stopped in its course floods and ebbs in  
the tide as before,

And the stars that left the heavens to shine on this cradle  
slip back contentedly to their orbits,

And the streets resound with manytoned cries again after  
the penitential silences,

And suns that went dim on this holiday are lustrously relit  
in the sky:

So it is that the baby comes to us divinely despatched and  
attended,

So it is that not only this mother but all mothers may see  
that motherhood is of the greatest avail.

Mothers, all of you, listen to me, and I will inform your  
fiercely fervent faith:

I do not lose sight of you or make less of you wherever you  
are, in garrets or palaces,

And I pour into you wide flowing far advancing floods of  
consolation.

I am not standing only at the bedside of my dear friend: I  
stand at all bedsides,

For each bed the earth over contains my dear friend  
though we dont as much as know each others' names:  
I stand by bedsides of pity, bedsides of congratulation, bed-  
sides of revolt:

And here it is that I see babies come with nobody to wel-  
come them—

I see that mothers must shudder at motherhood because the  
pathway is so roughened with want—

And that is why looking at the injustice of the world I sen-  
tence the world to be barren:

I say: We must have no more children till the world has  
learned how to be just to fathers and mothers.

But the fathers who pay the father costs and the mothers  
who pay the mother costs plead and I relent:

Relent in sorrow, seeing that I must not cross the fertile  
parent hunger of my children,

And remain sorrowful, weeping bitter tears, wishing the  
race dream was made easier for my stubborn children—

My wanton wilful ungovernable divine children—

But not daring to withhold my sanction from those who  
counting all risks are ready to adventure.

Dear mother, mother of the new child, and all you mothers,  
mothers of all children,

Hear me: listen to me as I say these big ancient things to  
you in today's tongue:

I do not need to retreat to the masters to find words and  
signs to make my intention plain:

You take me in at a glance—you know the size and quality  
of my promise:

I remove the clouds from the prospect so that motherhood  
may glow as the central star,

And I appoint with motherhood the regeneration of all the  
future—

The motherhood not of fathers not of laws not of traditions  
but the free motherhood of love.

Little mother, I listened outside your door and they told  
me how you got on,  
And I grieved for you who suffered and I danced with mad  
jollity for you who rejoiced,  
And I laid upon your doorsill the tax of my utmost passion,  
Until the travail was all past and the deliverance,  
And then I left you to retake my anonymous part in the  
crowd,  
Leaving behind me that which you will always feel though  
it never goes by my name—  
I who mothered your motherhood and fathered the father  
your mate.  
And now the baby is born.

### THE LITTLE OLD MOTHER AT THE STREET CORNER

The little old mother at the street corner:  
The simple woman, so perfectly dressed, wearing the tiny  
cap over her gray hair:  
I can see her now from these near days way back in those  
far years:  
I can see her now sitting on a box by her apple stand next  
the curb:  
I can see her smiles to the passers by, her courtesies to her  
customers:  
I can hear her voice lifted to me in salutation: I stop for a  
minute as I hurry to work:  
I can see the strong nose on her dear face and the big wide  
open still clear blue eyes:

It all seems just like yesterday, just like today, just like this minute:

It all seems so close and so sacred: the long gone time: the bent tired serene reticent figure: a symbol of peace in the warring town.

Well: you have caught me alone with my heart: I am not ashamed of my heart:

Yes: you have caught me with tears in my eyes: I am not ashamed of my tears:

You remember and mourn for kings on thrones, in arts, of money—the few false heirs:

I remember and mourn for the people, for the outraged crowd, for the untitled millions—the countless true children.

Take your rulers, your geniuses, your offices, your arrogant decorations—

Leave me the common ways, the average, the dusty road: I tear the medals from my breast:

Yes: you have caught me alone with my heart and in tears: I am not ashamed of my heart and my tears.

Dear old mother! They say you are forgotten: they say so: were buried away in the ground plenty of years ago for good:

They lie, old mother: I do not forget you: I celebrate you: They lie: I never put you into a grave—I put you away in my heart:

Do you hear, mother?—in my heart: and there you have been ever since.

Dear old mother: the great men hold meetings in honor of each other—they make a vast hurrah about their size:

I stand aside, old mother: I will only hold meetings in your honor: in your honor—for no one else:

They set each other on thrones and bow low to each other  
and play that they are superior:

I dont set you on a throne, I dont bow low to you, but I  
see that you are supreme.

That's how it comes about, old mother, that you are alive  
and well this day as I write about you with a pen—

That's how it is that I reach down to you again and again  
now as you used to ask me to then and kiss you a boy's  
kiss on your mother lips:

That's why, mother: and that's why my tears flow and why  
I am glad beyond all other satisfactions to stand alone  
with you against the pride of the world.

They took my mother away and put her in a grave,  
And all around me mothers were taken away and put in  
graves,

And so I felt that mothers died and somehow were lost for  
forever and ever,

And I often went by you and received your "how are you  
sonny" not really knowing you,

And when with a friendly smile you gave me the specked  
fruit that nobody would buy I was grateful but did not  
know you,

And when I stopped and you asked me questions about my-  
self and told me about a cat you had at home and such  
things I was pleased but did not know you,

And so it went on like that for a long long time, my seeing  
you yet not knowing you:

Then one day I awoke: after passing you something struck  
me—some light, some pang, within:

I went back to you—you wondered—you looked up: I said  
nothing—only kissed you:

God! how impossible worlds opened into impossible worlds  
with that kiss!

God! how stars reached to stars, souls to souls, all space to all space and all time to all time, with that kiss!

You knew something was happening to me—you didn't know what: you stroked my cheek with your open hand.

From that day to all days, little mother, things were so different to me:

I saw in your face all the mother faces of the earth,

I saw that no mothers ever died—that that was a clumsy calumny,

I saw that my own mother and my comrade mothers and every mother lived on and on without limit,

I saw them all sitting there with you on the little box by the apple stand filling flushing the highway with their illuminating maternity—

Sitting there with you while all motherhood grew bigger and bigger and covered the heavens and all the big buildings shrunk smaller and smaller and vanished from sight:

I saw all the pageantry of the social order cower before the verity of your wrinkled face and the apples and pears spread out for sale and the little bag of pennies at your waist:

It all came to me in that flash from God knows where: all through you:

All came to me, little mother, some way out of your hand touching me and out of your words spoken to me in love.

I hear a voice: it has something particular to say to me: "sonny" it calls me:

What has the voice to say to me? I guess I know: it calls me away from the bypaths to itself on the main road:

I see a face: the face is grave and beautiful with age: it has something particular to convey to me:

That face coming to me in many faces—in all faces of old women I pass on the street:

That voice coming to me in many voices—in all voices of old women I pass on the street:

It calls me from my little river to its big sea: it calls me: I set full sail: I go:

The mother voice, the mother gesture, calling me: I hurry: I go:

Do not argue with me: my decision is made: mother, O mother, where are you?

Let me hear your voice again: O mother, O mother, I come: receive me:

Ah! you are there—I feel your arm about me—I am safe.

Yes: I see her now, just as if it was this minute, just as if it was first going on as I write:

She takes me out of my transitory death into her inexpugnable life:

The little old mother at the street corner.

## THEY CAME TO ME AND TOLD ME YOU WERE DEAD

They came to me and told me you were dead, Carrie Rand,

And my heart stopped still and a cloud fell on my path,  
But the next minute I knew that what they said was not true—

I knew that you were still alive somewhere and somehow continuing your round of succor,

And so I went about my business again contented with the  
rhythm of the average day.

I saw you as you sat in your chair in the beautiful sunlight,  
Carrie Rand,  
And I saw the world's poor pass in procession before you  
and receive your benediction,  
And I saw lightnings flash from your resolute eyes towards  
the children of chaos,  
And I saw lovebeams flash from your melting eyes towards  
the children of order,  
And all as you sat in your chair and said nothing and did  
not move,  
And all as you sat in your chair with the forerays of a new  
earth cast into your illumined face,  
You, Carrie Rand, grown young in age again in the sur-  
prises of springtide years,  
Among the youngest of those who hope the youngest in  
hope forever.

They told me you were dead, Carrie Rand: dead, dead:  
But that word death—what meaning has it to me?  
It does not tell me anything of the time of the day or of the  
night, or of the time of eternity,  
It does not fill any blank spaces of desire or open any closed  
doors of dreams,  
It does not carry any of the burdens of life or make easier  
the mysteries of defeat and corruption:  
It is a good word for the undertaker, it is a passable word  
for the priest, but for love, dear love—  
It is not a word that fits with love in any heres or hereafters  
of the stars.

When they say death I do not see your face, Carrie Rand,  
But when they say life I see your face, Carrie Rand:

Death, that takes down the sign from the doorpost and sells  
to any bidder the few poor things that remain:  
Death is not a word that fits with love, Carrie Rand:  
Death is a dead word that will not fit with you, Carrie  
Rand.

What do you mean, my brother, when you speak of death?  
Do you mean that life passes a sentence upon life?  
Do you mean that the whole account of life can in any way  
be charged off?  
Do you mean that in the throw of the dice death comes up  
doubles and life is outfigured by death?  
I have tried to take this master woman and measure her by  
the measure of death but death failed to measure her,  
I have found that she could only be measured by the meas-  
ure of the fullest life and then but barely measured.

A few days ago you were in the midst of us, Carrie Rand:  
You sat in your chair and were silent and your silence was  
as powerful as armies on the march,  
You sat in your chair and talked to us and your wisdom  
was the counsel of universal service,  
You called success after the seekers, you cried hurrah to  
those who arrived,  
Through you heroism rose to its best renown and proved its  
faith on impossible peaks,  
Through you the distant world and the near world were  
brought together and understood each other,  
Through you, as you sat in your chair—you, who did not  
ask anything: you, who gave everything:  
The measure of your acclaim was the exhaustless fuel of  
revolution.  
Out of you were draughts of pity paid, out of you were  
notes of love endorsed,

Your oldest old age was the youngest youth of the world.  
If the bravest were brave you were braver still,  
If the simplest were modest you were more modest still,  
You took the great cause to your heart and gave your great  
heart to the cause,  
You refreshed the timeworn years with immortal jubila-  
tion.

They came to me and told me you were dead, Carrie Rand.  
And my heart stopped still and a cloud fell on my path,  
But the next minute I knew that what they said was not  
true—  
I knew that you were still alive somewhere and somehow  
continuing your round of succor,  
And so I went about my business again contented with the  
rhythm of the average day.

### I HAVE TRIED TO KEEP A LITTLE OF MYSELF

I have tried to keep a little of myself for other uses,  
But love denies my reserve: I must have all, says love.  
I bargained sharply with love and love kept away,  
I wondered this of love and that of love and love was still  
alienated.  
I looked for love in the open day and in dark places and  
love baffled my desire,  
But when I stopped looking and simply loved love came  
hurrying—  
Came to me from hell hot with fire,  
Came to me from heaven calm with justice

I could not cheat love:

When I reminded love of my sins love smiled and loved on,  
When I reminded love of my purity love smiled the same  
smile and loved on.

Then I asked: Love seems to take no account of best and  
bad: what does love take account of?

When I said evil love loved on and did not seem to under-  
stand,

When I said good love loved on and did not seem to under-  
stand,

But when I looked love towards love—

The animal love of my body,

The animal love of my soul,

The love not animal of my body and my soul—

Then love seemed to understand,

Adjourning the universe to fulfil our pregnant plight.

## I GO WHERE MY HEART GOES

When we understand each other, all in all,  
When two friends understand each other after they have misunderstood,  
When nations understand each other in peace after they have misunderstood each other in war,  
When fathers, mothers, children, friends, people, understand, all understand all,  
Oh! that must be heaven—there is nothing beyond.

You have passed in all the collaterals of love but where is love?  
You have brought me love's dresses and love's habits and love's alphabets but have not brought me love,  
You have brought me soul's love that forgot the body,  
You have brought me body's love that forgot the soul,  
But love still waits expecting a complete return.  
For I, said love, when I take possession of life,  
I, too, sing, and sing a song beyond the songs of song,  
For I go singing not in words but in shapes and phantoms that give words leave to be.  
You put your ear to the roots of the trees and you hear my song,  
Or to the shuttle of the loom and hear my song,  
Or to the farmer's plow and hear my song,  
Or to the needle of the sewer and hear my song,  
Or to the heart, not the lips, of the famous woman who sings and hear my song,  
Or to anything anywhere away from words and hear my song:  
For outside the meanings of my song there is no meaning to me,  
For if life in all its heaven and hell escapes me then I am empty and count like a cipher.

I have trailed myself laboriously in all the ages through the phrases of the parleyers with words,  
But I have found that words are only loyal when they report back to life again and ask for orders:  
And I who am love am the only life,  
And therefore words must report back to me forever for their consequent realities.

## I GO WHERE MY HEART GOES

I go where my heart goes: where else should I go?  
With or without reason, I go with my heart:  
Whether urged to go or warned to stay, I go with my heart:  
In the face of everything bitter and sweet, false and true, I  
go with my heart:  
Joyously into any shadow, victoriously towards whatever defeat,  
I go with my heart:  
Being afraid sometimes to risk what I must become, yet  
being more afraid to remain what I am:  
Often denying love to go with love, denying light to find  
light:  
Choosing for good and all the heart's wish, steering for  
good and all the heart's course:  
Acknowledging the world I leave but ready and eager for  
the world I go to:  
Ready for disaster and wreck and death in the world I go to:  
Ready for the worst that turns up: ready to lose all and get  
oblivion:  
Ready for the heart's demands, the heart's decisions, the  
heart's denials:  
Oh, so ready to go where the heart goes: oh, so eager to go  
where the heart goes!

Do you go with the state? Well, so do I if the state goes  
with the heart:  
But if the state goes against the heart then I go against the  
state:  
And your church the same, and your books, and all your  
proud scholarship:  
If they go against the heart then I go against them:

It makes no difference what they go with, if they go against  
the heart I go against them:

They may establish their laws: I will show that their laws  
are lawless:

They may put up imposing libraries and schools: I will  
show that their learning fastens chains on the crowd:

For the way the heart goes is the way the people go: there  
is no other way:

And if the institutions go against the heart they go against  
the people,

And nothing that goes against the people can stand: nothing:  
nothing:

It may seem to flourish for awhile but is bound to come  
down: it has no foundation:

The earth will go out from under it—gravitation will go  
out—faith will go out:

As surely as it is against love it is against life,

As surely as it is against the heart the heart will reduce it  
to dust.

A man's or a woman's home is where a man's or a woman's  
love is:

If you dont go where your heart goes where do you go?—if  
you dont go to love where do you go?

And if you go east while your heart goes west what will fill  
up the mocking gap between?

And if you keep the north star over your shoulder instead of  
straight ahead nothing can untangle your twisted feet:

And you let your heart go somewhere alone: you do not go  
with your heart:

You know your heart goes right—goes where it belongs:  
but you do not go with your heart:

And you fail to go where your heart goes: you go with an  
income or a house:

And you arraign the heart: you have discovered that the heart is a stumbling guide:

And you say that the heart needs eyes, which I say, too: who sees it better than I do?

And I say that the heart has eyes, which you do not say, too: (Oh such eyes as the heart has! has life eyes? only such eyes as the heart has!):

And so you make a contract with the world: you will go where the world goes:

And you will profane the days and nights with your perfidy: you will go where treason goes:

And when you rob or kill you will call robbing or killing by pleasant names so as to feel at ease with your bloody hands:

You who do not go where life goes but go where death goes:

You who do not go where heaven goes but go where hell goes:

You who—

I go where my heart goes: where else should I go?

I do not want to go right if my heart goes wrong:

I am not bothered with right or wrong anyhow: I am bothered only about my heart:

I could be very good and not going where my heart goes fail, O shamefully fail!

I could be very bad and going where my heart goes win, O gloriously win!

I will stand by you in a pinch, my heart: through thick and thin you will feel my supporting arm:

Long and often I have leaned on you, you have leaned on me, as we trudged along together:

I unfailingly go with you: where you go I will go: tomorrow, next day, always:

I will let the properties go their way: the reputations: the  
great men:

Nothing is of use to me but you, O my heart: nothing but  
you, O fallible heroic heart!

I will go where you go: I know nowhere else to go:

I have tried to find some other place to go, but I return to  
you:

I will let the crowd go with the legislature: I will go where  
there is no legislature: where there is only love:

For he who goes where his heart goes may have to give up  
all who love him to get all he loves:

He may have to be misunderstood by everybody to get so he  
may understand himself:

But he who goes where his heart goes, goes where all futures  
go and is exalted:

I go where my heart goes: where else should I go?

### AND THIS IS WHAT LOVE SAID

And this is what Love said to me in the watch of our  
night:

Go into the broadcast world,

Try your love on haters, on the alien, thieves, those who  
take life,

Try your love in wars, in the drift and dreg of the under-  
flow,

Let your love take lessons of those who do not love yet en-  
dure—of those who without returns yet live.

Why should you palter here with your untried love—here  
at hospitable gates?

Why should your love keep its feet tender and its palms soft?

Go with your love where it is not wanted:

Go with love to locked doors, where it finds backs turned  
or eyes casting suspicious looks:

Take it where it must be maimed: offer it as a last tribute  
to murder:

Drag it through gutters and slime, trail it through vice,  
track it across bloodshed:

Fling it to vipers, freeze it in arctic ice, burn it in tropic  
fire.

What is this love you fix and fit in a parlor and set forth  
on carpets?

You swear it is love: you bring it along with all the ac-  
cepted credentials:

But I do not recognize the counterfeit, my heart rejects the  
sham.

Love of attitudes and dress, love of arbors and great for-  
tunes,

Love of flowers and gentility, love of perfumes and joyances,

Love of feeders and clothers, love of flatterers and suborners,

Love that masks and mocks, love that stutters and steals.

Take your love away and suffer with it—

Take it to calvaries, fast with it in wildernesses,

Travel till its feet bleed, till its sight is gone, till it drops  
by the wayside.

You dally with me, demanding to exchange love for love:

I declare that you must exchange love for hate:

You come to me as to one preferred to all the rest:

I shall expect you to prefer all the rest, then come to me.

You brought me armfuls of roses: their sweet accents were  
daggers—their fair colors were poisons:

But your careful fingers were not once pricked by a thorn:

Your gloved precautions allowed you to worship without  
harm,

But I am cruel—I demand pain and hurt: I only desire you  
after you are despoiled and defeated.

Go now: we have had sweet days together: but sweet days  
are not love.

Go now: we have tested our love by all the golden rules of  
precedent and prestige.

Now you must abandon the road, must desert all known  
paths and trust yourself to the outlying spaces.

After many days you may—you may, O heart—come back  
to me again with love:

After days, survivals, you may come back to me:

Then you will put your love at my threshold and go away:

You will go away: and you will not come again till I call:  
and you will go cheerfully about your life and listen:

And my heart will not forget.

And that is what Love said to me in the watch of our night.

### SWEAR TO ME, SAID MY LOVE

Swear to me, said my love, that you are mine:

Bring yourself to me outside my door and wait:

My lovers have come in numbers but they go,

I call for love that asks for nothing and gives all.

I am tired of the debits and credits of love,

I am tired of the vows of lovers,

I leave you as free as I ask to be myself.

Swear to me, said my love, that love is not a bond:

Love's body is for love's body, that is all,

Love's soul is for love's soul, that is all.

I give all for all, I bargain for nothing less,

And as much as you confer just so much you take away.

Come to me, said my love, for I am hungry and thirsty:

I am forbidden the gobetweens, I am forbidden the ques-  
tions and answers:

Come to me whole, come unburdened, come,  
Your body dreaming of my body, your soul dreaming of my  
soul,  
Your full surrender for my full surrender completing the  
hour of joy:  
Come in the fulness of harvests, come in the overflow of  
streams.  
Come, said my love, come in the repeal of the law, come  
in the outrage of custom:  
Our love is the love of revolt, our love is the rebel dream:  
It is mellow and full like a tree heavy with fruit,  
It is rank and wet like an earthplot ready with returns,  
It is all of heaven meeting all of hell, sphering a new do-  
main,  
This love, said my love, of your body,  
This love, said my love, of your soul:  
This love, yours and mine, pulsing with fervent life,  
Making amends for all the failed loves of the past.

## IF YOU WILL TELL ME WHAT LOVE IS FOR

If you will tell me what love is for,  
If you will tell me why the one man and the one woman  
are for each other,  
If you will tell me why bodies may be thousands of miles  
apart and may not meet but why love that is just as far  
apart may meet at will,  
If you will tell me why dreams of lovers that may never  
come true in the flesh still come true somehow,  
If you will tell me why nothing can stay love from love's  
purpose, nothing in seas or lands or laws,  
If you will tell me why a dream of love will thrill you like  
the flesh of love itself,

If you will tell me why the children of those who love are  
better lovers again than the children of those who hate,  
If you will tell me why love nestles at the root of the tree  
and makes and sustains the tree,  
If you will tell me why love breathes in the origins of all  
use and all beauty and makes and sustains all use and  
all beauty forever,  
If you will tell me why love has room for all the men and  
women of all the races in the same bridal bed and con-  
summates them in the same result,  
If you will tell me why other things will submit to be denied  
and sent away but why love will never submit to be  
denied and sent away,  
If you will tell me why fire, wind, flood, can destroy every-  
thing but love but can never destroy love,  
If you will tell me why the passion and the purity of love  
mix in the nebula of the common life,  
If you will tell me such things of love I will tell you such  
things of life,  
If you will tell me what love is for I will tell you what  
life is for.

Why should we not tell each other what love is for?  
Why should we betray the meaning of love to a meaning  
not of love?  
Why should we put love in chains and exact tribute of its  
immutable treasure?  
Why should we give a false name to the flesh and refuse it  
the suffrage of flesh?  
Why should we give a false name to denial and set it upon  
a throne and fall down and worship it?  
Why should we call all the mothers of children and the  
children of mothers by a false name and expect to be  
rewarded for our apostasy?

Why should love shrink from the body of love in a man or  
a woman when the whole universe is love's infinite  
body in beauty and power?

If you will tell me such things of love I will tell you such  
things of life,

If you will tell me what love is for I will tell you what life  
is for.

If you will tell me what love is for,

If you will tell me what my body, which is love, is for, and  
what my soul, which is love, is for,

If you will tell me what the hunger of a man for a woman  
is for and what the hunger of a woman for a man is  
for,

If you will tell me what the dreams of lovers made flesh are  
for,

If you will tell me what the flesh of lovers made dream is  
for,

If you will tell me such things of love I will tell you such  
things of life,

If you will tell me what love is for I will tell you what life  
is for.

## LOVE KNOWS BEST WHAT TO DO WITH LOVE

Love knows best what to do with love:

As the tree knows best what to do with the fruit,

As the field knows best what to do with the harvest,

As the river knows best what to do with the tides,

As the sun knows best what to do with the light,

As today knows best what to do with tomorrow,

So does love know best what to do with love.

Love knows best what to do with love—

Knows better than the priest, knows better than the laws,  
what to do with love—

Yes, knows better than parents and counsellors what to do  
with love:

Doing the worst it can, still knows better than any guardian  
what to do with love,

Though stumbling and falling often still knows best what  
to do with love.

And though I go through hell I can go through hell joyfully  
with love,

And though I fly on wings to celestia without love the sun  
of heaven will go out,

And though life offers me great rewards if these rewards are  
not rewards of love I would rather take my chances  
with death,

And though love gives no end of trouble to a man the lack  
of love is worse sorrow,

And though I hate love because it coerces me I love love  
because it frees me,

And though people are afraid to trust themselves to love I  
never knew love to go into the hands of a receiver,

And though all my neighbors set up signs against the tres-  
pass of my love my love does not heed the fences,

And so I do not doubt that the corruption in a man with  
love is purer than the saintliness in a man without love,

And that any heaven that came to a man without love  
would not be worth as much as a hell that came to a  
man with love,

And that you, no matter who you are, should go with love  
to the ends of love and not be afraid,

And that all laws and all customs should go with love to the  
ends of love and not be afraid,

And that if you, no matter who you are, deny love, and that  
if the laws and the customs deny love,  
It is like locking yourself in somewhere, like locking the  
laws and customs in somewhere, and throwing away  
the key.

I know that the fulfilment of love is terrible with dangers  
and sacrifices,  
And I know that you have to give up almost everything else  
before you can get love—  
As the mother gives up almost everything, almost life itself,  
to get her child,  
As the seed gives up almost everything, almost life itself, to  
get the flower:  
And I know that only those who are rich enough to pay the  
tolls should attempt the journey,  
For I know that the delicate people with white hands are  
not equal to the undertaking—  
To that final adventure which leads over troublesome seas  
and wild lands before home is reached:  
Which leads over earths and stars and suns of heat and cold  
and storm and calm before home is reached:  
Before love lies down with love secured in love's dear arms.

I hear confusing voices of protest:  
Voices set up by legislatures to tell me how to go,  
Voices set up in parlors to tell me how to go,  
Voices set up in trade and by my friends and my dear  
brothers and all to tell me how to go,  
Voices of philosophy and art to tell me how to go:  
I hear them all and accept them all and acknowledge their  
sacred meanings,  
But that voice within me uttering admonitions more potent  
even than the chorus of dissent,

That single voice so modestly advising me, possessing my  
ardent soul,  
That voice appointing the prohibited way and issuing the  
challenge of rebellion,  
Takes me forth into the darkest night on the lightest feet,  
And leaves me to myself and leaves me to love.

Good bye, dear brothers and sisters, it is too late to hold  
me back:  
And you, my father and mother, and you, my wife and chil-  
dren—it is too late, too late:  
Good bye, dear laws: good bye, dear habits of ordered life  
—it is too late to hold me back:  
Good bye to you, dear creeds—good bye to you, O teachers  
and priests: I go, I go—my heart takes me away:  
You were all very dear to me, the beautiful with the ugly  
very dear to me, living in routine and in the camp:  
I could not say how dear you all were to me and I do not  
part from you without regret,  
But I go: the fresher voice leads me on—the irresistible  
voice releases me from where I was tied and harried,  
And though I call words of farewell to you over my shoul-  
der as long as we are within hearing of each other, and  
after,  
Nothing now can hold me back—nothing now can temper  
my hastening feet:  
Love knows best what to do with love.

## I SPEND MY DAYS AND NIGHTS WITH THOSE I LOVE

I spend my days and nights with those I love:  
I pass without leave or hindrance into the nooks and cor-  
ners of human hearts:

I who mostly rejected yet do not reject myself—who am in  
great favor with myself:  
I go my rounds collecting my fee, the fee of love—making  
my claims so big:  
Remitting no tax: demanding the last cent—the final drop  
of blood:  
Hungry to eat and thirsty to drink the sure feast that may be  
set:  
Turning aside into no minor currents but keeping to the  
main stream,  
Caring for nothing else, indifferent to rewards—indifferent  
to results good or bad,  
Not eager about fame, about being seen—only eager about  
love:  
Nestling seedlike in the ground producing the flowers,  
Falling as rain from the clouds, flowing as rivers from the  
hills, creating the sea:  
I, going among men, passing everything by but love, seeing  
only love:  
Blind to the great houses, blind to the great men, blind to  
money and show—  
My eyes shut to them, unconscious of them: my eyes open  
to love, conscious alone of love:  
Pitiless to those who possessing fortunes come without love,  
turning them away,  
Pitiful to those who possessing nothing come with love,  
taking them in my arms:  
Throwing all of me open to all of them without restraint:  
Asking no returns—willing to love: not asking that they  
love me: asking only that they love:  
Satisfied with seeing love about me, seeing it in men, see-  
ing it in deeds, loosened in the air:  
Not asking love to look at me or enthrone me—to fix any  
honor on me:

Only too joyful to see love at work, only too well repaid,  
standing out of sight, seeing love responding to love—  
As life answers the sun, coming to proof in harvests and  
people,  
Love so answering to life, coming to proof in mercies and  
ameliorations.

They fished his dead body out of the river: they said he  
died for love:

He had gone his limit: life was useless to him: he was dis-  
appointed in love:

It seemed to me different: it seemed to me he died for  
want of love:

It seemed to me different: it seemed to me love was disap-  
pointed in him.

What have you got to do with love anyhow except to love?  
When you blow your brains out for love dont you blow love  
out with your brains?

When you murder the girl you love because she does not  
love you, have you really murdered the girl?

It seems to me different: you have not murdered the girl:  
the girl lives: you have murdered love.

The lovers quarrel: they separate with bitter accusations:  
love is no longer love, they say:

It seems to me different: love is more love than ever: love  
may now taste its sweetest fruit.

It is easy enough to love when you are loved, but to love  
when you are not loved—that is a step beyond.

Some one dearest to you dies: you grieve—die: heartbroken:  
you, so innocent, so loyal:

It seems to me different: you throw life away after death:  
you, so guilty, so traitorous.

To give up because another gives up is no reason at all: it  
is in place of a reason;

Though all the rest retreat, though you stand alone, though  
no ally is left to call upon—well, you may still love:

And the main question is not whether people give you up  
but whether you give people up:

And when I look at the despoiled bodies of men and women  
who throw themselves away for love I am discontented:

I say to despairers who throw themselves away for love: it  
would have been better evidence of love if you had  
saved yourselves for love.

It seems to me different: love can't be put into a grave: love  
is what the grave spares:

You who killed your friend because you loved him did not  
love your friend—you only loved a shadow thrown on  
the ground:

And loving the shadow of anything is not enough—only  
loving love is enough: love's unspotted light: no less:

And you who love even in the loss of love never destroy life  
in others or yourself for love:

No: you give others, yourself, extra reasons for living—  
reasons supreme above all reasons for ceaseless futures.

That's how it all seems different to me: how love refuses to  
feed death—how love feeds only life, prodigally, with-  
out end:

That's how it all seems different to me: how love takes no  
revenges and buys and sells no one: how love only  
loves and scorns reward:

That's how it all seems different to me: how love standing  
without a companion like a tree in a desert still finds  
reasons for loving.

It is beautiful to love those who care for you and dream of  
you and call you comrade:

It is more beautiful to love those who are in doubt about  
you—who do not want your love:

If a man expects pay for love he has to be wary how he loves and whom he trusts:

I am heedless about love because I never charge my love up against you:

I do not mind making mistakes: what is a mistake or two against all the love I contain?

The whole earth is not too big for me to love in: and all the stars—they are not too big:

Nothing exhausts my love: I go with it wherever men are and things are, whether there is excuse for love or no excuse for love:

(Is there any world anywhere or any thing in any world anywhere in which there is no excuse for love?):

All the people are not too many for me to love with: all the people of all worlds: they are not too many:

I do not run out of love: it would take more than all the globes in space to drain me dry:

I spend my days and nights with those I love.

### WHEN I AM EASY ABOUT LOVE

When I am easy about love I am easy about life and death: It makes no difference to me then if the sun does not shine: I am not worried because affairs go wrong when love goes right:

I reach out and somehow everything falls into the palm of my hand—

All beauty and goodness fall there, all dreaming and hoping fall there:

Though I own no lands and am without fame yet I am as rich as love:

The old jealousies slip away, the grudges and animosities slink out of sight:

Now all life gathers round me—all the people and all the stars gather:

For being easy about love and being easy about life is like being finally free:

For then I go to everything and everything comes to me and the dissenting spheres are blended.

What is it all about—this yes and no of dust and the soul?

I do not know—I do not need to know: I am satisfied just to keep on my way:

I too ask questions and ask again but I do not have to be answered:

The sun shines, my family the crowd work and aspire, and I love:

To me that is enough and more than enough: there is nothing beyond that:

To be loved is not enough: it is something but it is not enough:

But to love—that is enough: that is the substance at the center from which everything emerges:

And that is why when I am easy about love I am easy about you and anyone else:

And that is why when I am easy about love I am easy about the wrongs and sorrows of men:

For being easy about love is to know that love will after all confusions in the end prevail:

For being easy about love is to see past the imperfections to perfection, past blindness to vision:

For being easy about love is being easy about the burdens I must bear over bad roads to my waiting children.

When I am easy about love I am easy about life and death:

And then I am easy about my body and my bodily desires and consummations:

And then I am easy about my spirit and its forthreaching discoveries:

And then I can pierce farther into things different and see them way off come together:

And so I am easy about the evils that without love would break my heart:

About my comrade whose dear daughter just died and was buried and about my dear son who left me long ago:

About all the mothers who wring their despoiled hands and the fathers who stand by their sides and are silent:

About the wars and the earthquakes and the greeds which men endure and with which they contend:

I am easy about it all because I am easy about love: I can give you no other reason for it:

I am easy about love because love is easy about life and life is easy about death:

I visit you with ceaseless consolations: in days and nights of surrender I am with you and in you:

You, my brothers, who are not so easy about love—who have yet to learn the lesson:

You, you, you: oh! because I am easy about love I am easy about you!

If I was not easy about love I would be easy about nothing,  
And I think I would give up just where I am or where I was when I started,

And I am afraid I could not battle against the cruelties of the world with more than half a heart,

And it is very likely that I would no longer be of use to you, my dear companions, for my cheer would be gone,  
For being easy about love means being easy about everything:

For being easy about love means taking the worst and always making the best out of it,

For being easy about love means being so full of life as to  
leave no room for death:  
So that being easy about love is necessary for you and for  
me if we are to live:  
And being easy about love is necessary for states and religions  
and peoples if they are to live:  
There is no doubt about it: it comes to me more and more:  
it more and more steadies and enlarges me:  
Being easy about love—in no matter what place or time of  
hate, being easy about love:  
No matter what may seem to make it impossible, being  
easy about love:  
When I am easy about love I am easy about life and death.

### IF I CONTAINED ENOUGH LOVE

If I contained enough love,  
If I provided in my simple love for all trespasses and all  
failures,  
If I had size enough to see that no man however small is  
too little to be big,  
If I acknowledged the griefs and still prevailed everywhere  
with my joys,  
If I came along after the strongest had given up and revived  
you with my unequivocal strength,  
Might I not then put a new face on the earth and give new  
meanings to the shining suns?  
Might I not then plow into every soil with my gladness and  
prepare it for adequate harvests?  
Might I not, O my body, O my soul? might I not be the  
fellow and equal of the passing years?  
I who too often drop behind might go forward too with sustained nerve:

I who am uncertain might become certain and stand forth  
with unbeaten courage.

I dont think anything is lacking in the earth: the lack is in  
me:

Just as the lack of justice in men is not in men but in me:  
So that if I lift up my head and keep myself aloft I need not  
apologize for my height.

I have heard other things said but somehow I come to this  
thing and stay with it:

It seems final: it puts the whole problem up to me:

Puts the universe up to me: big as it is, little as I am, puts  
it up to me.

If I contained enough love it would not matter how much  
love you contained,

For I could make up for you and for others and have love to  
spare:

And miracles would be vulgar in the eyes of my love, which  
would so bounteously encircle all need,

And the philosophy of those who live in books would seem  
cheap and thin beside me,

And your facts, your numbers, your markets, would retire  
shamefaced from all competitions:

For containing love means containing life, and containing  
enough love means containing enough life.

We put our reliance on other things when we miss love, but  
when we have love love calls for no allies.

So I charge all derelicts to my own account:

And when I go on the street and see the girls hopelessly  
afloat there I charge that to myself, too:

And the murderer who is killed to keep the law alive—I  
charge his murder against my own total:

For I am convinced that but for me no girl would have to  
give anything but love for love,

And I see plainly that but for me no man my brother would  
do that for which you execute him:  
For if I contained enough love I would love enough to hold  
evil back:  
For if I contained enough love I would love enough to put  
good forward:  
My love always being on guard invisibly potent in the  
silences.

That is why I am not hard on you or on myself when we  
dont just toe the mark:  
That is why I can contemplate even injustice without mad  
anger though with sorrow:  
That is why I am willing to have you try again and claim  
infinite room for myself in space and time:  
For the bill must all be charged to me—the bill of bank-  
ruptcy must be charged to me:  
If I contained enough love it would not matter what else I  
contained or you contained:  
We might do whatever harm, yet love would mercifully  
consecrate us:  
We might make whatever missteps, yet love would guide us  
home:  
The sun containing enough light is not as great as your  
heart or my heart containing enough love.

The trouble with the world is that it has thrown away love  
for everything else:  
Its commerce has thrown away love: its churches and states  
have thrown away love:  
Even its priests have thrown away love for their creeds and  
the clothes they wear:  
And when we buy and sell love comes in only for the leav-  
ings: love is not first but last:

And even in our loves love comes in with an apology and often is not allowed in at all:

And when we say a man is victorious we dont mean that he loves above all baseness but that he has an income above all need:

And so we have got used to getting along with life without love in it:

And that is why we have wars and rob each other in trade and are willing to kill our children for profit:

And that is why we can eat full meals and forget the empty wanderers on the street outside:

And that is why we can pass the wrecks on the broad avenues and not admit our own responsibility:

And that is why we beat each other down into dust with dollars fighting dollars in fierce resentment:

That is why: that is why: I see that is why: and I see that I am the culprit:

For if I contained enough love the world would contain enough justice:

For if I contained enough love there would be no room in you or anyone for anything else but the love I disperse.

I contain much love: I feel its stir: I am big and stern with its currents sweeping within me:

O God! if I could only get it out! if I could only pour it into the common stream!

Shame upon me that I hoard it up! that I keep it for myself when it belongs to all!

What ails me? why am I so slow to answer the world's call? your call, O my brother?

What happens to me that instead of loving I talk of love—instead of being brave I talk of bravery?

I contain much love: I know that I contain love enough to change the face of the earth:

Why, then, am I so reluctant? do I release it in small particles?

Why shouldn't I just get out of my love's way and let it flood you all?

Why should I say you do not understand or the lords of habit and routine will resist me?

Why should I take that as my excuse for damming you up? why should I hide and dodge the sacred summons?

I contain much love: why should I not let it go? let it go even if it means ruin as well as fertility?

Why should I rein myself in? how can I kill my love and expect to live?

How can I stand before my judges and deny it and think that my acquittal liberates me?

If I contained enough love.

### I THINK MY LOVE DOES NOT KNOW

I think my love does not know,

I think my love is satisfied not to know—

I think my love only loves—loves, loves and loves again:

I think my love does not know.

My love used to be eternally asking questions that could not be answered,

Now I think my love asks no questions and would be sorry if any questions were answered.

My love was once eager for the return of love, eager for the full return of love,

Now my love does not care, now my love will make no claims.

My love once put itself into scales and weighed itself and still called itself love,

Now my love has thrown away its scales and proclaims that  
love is not consistent with weight and measure.

Once my love was jealous and put love into a prison and put  
a price upon love,

Now my love welcomes love wherever and however it ap-  
pears and has turned its back upon the market.

I think my love is no longer careful of itself but is careless  
of itself,

I think my love has suffered all the hells of love and enjoyed  
all the heavens of love and has survived both the heav-  
ens and hells of love,

I think my love does not ask for privileges but just takes  
what comes and is happy,

I think my love does not require attention but likes to be  
about and mix anonymously with the crowd,

I think my love is willing to be neglected and hated because  
neither neglect nor hate can hurt my love,

I think my love is very much in love with the flesh but  
always stops short of surrender to the flesh,

I think my love is very much in love with the soul but al-  
ways stops short of surrender to the soul,

I think my love knows very little or nothing about itself but  
is satisfied to love and love and know nothing.

I could not tell what love has been to me since the day that  
love made way for love,

I could not tell what love has been to me since it stopped  
asking questions and just went about its business in the  
world.

I found that love had only one thing to do in the world,  
that love was only to love,

I found that love had no more to do with the saints than  
with the sinners of the world,

I found that love had no more to do with the lovers than  
with the haters of the world,  
I found that love was not to buy and sell and was not to  
exchange love,  
I found that love was only to give away love and was to  
give away love and was to give away love,  
I found that love was not to condemn sin and praise virtue  
but was only to love and see neither sin nor virtue,  
I found that love belonged to man not because man was  
good or bad but because man was man.  
I could not tell what love has been to me since love resigned  
all its emoluments and conditions and submitted itself  
to love alone.

My love was never happy when it thought it knew what  
love was or thought it needed to know,  
My love was never fair and generous when it thought love  
was reward and love was service,  
My love was never love when it belonged to the tempera-  
ture and to the north and south of the compass,  
My love only became love when it cast aside all guides and  
lost all reckoning of latitude and longitude,  
My love was only love when it threw away all records and  
prospectuses and ignored the challenge of time,  
My love was only love when it passed unrecognized into the  
general heart and became the bread and water of its  
daily life.

I used to try to be reasonable with love but love escaped my  
reason,  
I used to ask love to be reasonable with me but I escaped  
love's reason,  
I used to indulge my love in the orderly and usual ways but  
love took refuge in chaos and mystery,

I used to submit love to the focus of my two eyes but love  
lost all perspective,  
I used to key love to the partisan tones of my two ears but  
love reverted to discord.

I think my love does not know,  
I think my love is satisfied not to know,  
I think my love is so pleased with love it has no desires be-  
yond love,  
I think my love only loves—loves, loves and loves again.

## I DO NOT SEEM TO HAVE WORDS FOR YOU

I do not seem to have words for you tonight:  
Love does not always have things to say.  
Love looks at the stars and says nothing,  
Love looks in a woman's face or a man's face or a child's  
face and says nothing,  
Love meets love in the consummating equalities of the flesh  
and the spirit and says nothing,  
Love is not less worth while, love is more worth while, be-  
cause of the silences of love:  
I do not seem to have words for you tonight.

I do not seem to have words for you tonight:  
It may be that the stars in the skies have words,  
It may be that the waves of the sea have words,  
It may be that the love I bore you yesterday has words,  
It may be that the love I am to bear you tomorrow has  
words,  
It may be that the street has words, and the opera, and the  
things you enjoy, that all have words,

It may be that the house has words, and the locked doors,  
and the things you grieve about, that all have words,  
It may be that the money you make has words, and the  
money you lose, that money has wounding or healing  
words,

It may be that all things but me have words, are voluble,  
and swear to their loyalty in words,

It may be, it may be: who knows! I am silent here, O so  
silent, and do not know:

I sit here and regard you and drink you in and have no  
words to say,

I hear your voice, I see your open arms, I am beckoned by  
the open door, but I have no words to say,

I read your dear letters, so full of love—they come to me  
flooding me every day—but I have no words to say,

I feel the invitation of your body and the invitation of your  
soul, and have no words to say:

Something O so pregnant and certain stops me where I am  
and closes the exit of words—

The beautiful gate of words is closed, the beautiful gate of  
love is open,

The meanings of words themselves are washed clean in the  
silences:

I do not seem to have words for you tonight.

I do not seem to have words for you tonight:

The casual days are so full of words that beg and borrow  
and steal,

The casual days are so full of words that will not let love  
alone.

Now the heart is changed—it neither asks nor gives, it just  
loves,

Now something within me tells me that words must here-  
after let love alone,

Now the roots of the tree tell me how well they get along  
without words,  
Now life itself, all of life, and death itself, all of death,  
tell me how life and death get along without words,  
So that I am satisfied to be with you or away from you, my  
love, without words,  
So that I am after all the prisoning agreements of words set  
free in the worshipful stillness:  
I do not seem to have words for you tonight.

#### WHEN YOU DEFER TO LOVE IN A BOOK

When you defer to love in a book,  
When you feel that there must be something wrong with  
love,  
When you look around you wondering if those who see you  
may not impeach love,  
When you try love by some measure not a measure of love,  
When the opinion of the world takes the place of the opin-  
ion of love,  
When to love is thought dangerous and to not love is  
thought safe,  
When you wonder if the legislature may not set the bounds  
of love,  
When you defer to love in a book about love and doubt of  
love in a life full of love,  
Then I call you to order, then I return you rejected to your  
soul,  
You whose tried years have failed because they were afraid  
of their love.  
Was love only meant to be talked about and then put away?  
Was love only meant to be ashamed of and hurried out of  
sight?

Is love according to law all right and love according to life  
all wrong?

Are you brave with love in print and cowardly with love in  
your blood?

Do you think that anything else may be bravely avowed  
and that love is not to be bravely avowed?

Are you willing to consort with love in the shut and barred  
night and unwilling to consort with love in the wide  
open day?

You tremble for fear that some one has heard you speak  
honestly about love—

The woman in you trembles for fear seeing the man,

The man in you trembles for fear seeing the woman.

Do you only keep love for special hours and places and only  
love when you think nobody is looking?

I say that if there is anything wrong when you love the  
wrong is not in love but the wrong is in you,

I say that it may be safe to doubt any thing else but that it  
is never safe to doubt love,

I say that you may doubt your money and your fame and  
your virtue but that you may not doubt your love:

I say such things to you with a hot tongue so that you may  
know I am dead in earnest about love,

I say that you are in grave danger of destruction when you  
run away from love in life,

When you defer to love in a book.

## I TAKE LOVE AT ITS WORD

I take love at its word:

When things seem to be going wrong I take love at its  
word:

When the sun is eclipsed I take the sun at its word,

When my dreams fail to come true I take my dreams at  
their word,  
When I lie languishing in prison I take freedom at its word,  
When evil seems to triumph I take good at its word:  
In whatever shadow of sorrow I take joy at its word,  
In whatever failure I take success at its word—  
When the heart stops beating I take the heart at its word,  
When death prevails over life I take life at its word.  
The light can never set me aside: I take the light at its  
word:  
And hope—hope can never set me aside: I take hope at its  
word:  
I who love for ever: I take love at its word.

The tree that is fallen to the ground,  
The body that is violated and diseased,  
The ideals that are defeated in battle,  
The children that were born but failed to grow up,  
The planter who is not allowed to pick the fruit of his seed-  
cast,  
The woman who is married to the man she does not love,  
The man who is married to the woman he does not love,  
The singer whose voice does not sing,  
The writer whose words do not tell their story,  
The play that the people will not come to see,  
The ship that never gets into port:  
All the things that were designed and do not fulfil their de-  
sign:  
Even the honest man who does not fulfil his design but be-  
comes a thief,  
Even the lover who does not fulfil his design but learns to  
hate,  
Even the Cain who does not fulfil his design but kills his  
brother:

No matter who, who does not fulfil his design and is in despair,

I say to all: whatever you may be, I take you at your word:  
Whatever you may have lost you have not lost my love:  
For I who love for forever: I take love at its word.

Jesus with the nails through his hands took love at its word,  
Socrates with the hemlock at his lips took love at its word,  
Whitman in poverty and obloquy took love at its word,  
John Brown on Virginia's scaffold took love at its word:  
Are you afraid, you at your daily job, to take love at its word?

Are you willing to take hate at its word while you refuse to take love at its word?

Is it so easy to take sorrow at its word and be satisfied with sorrow?

Is it so hard to take gladness at its word and be satisfied with gladness?

Even if the seed does not flower I will take the seed at its word,

Even if the foundation is never built upon I take the foundation at its word,

Even if the idea is never put into a deed I take the idea at its word.

I am not thwarted by delays and miscarriages:

I know that while the clock may go wrong time must go right.

I look into an open grave: they have just put my young boy down there:

God help me! it is a blow over the heart:

But I say that though the grave may be dug deep I take my young boy at his word,

And I say that though the Devil may play his part I take God at his word.

I take love at its word:

There is nothing so bad I cannot take good at its word,

There is nothing so ugly I cannot take beauty at its word,

There is no cruelty so foul I cannot take kindness at its  
word,

There is no mind so bereaved I cannot take genius at its  
word,

There is nothing of so little account I cannot take riches at  
its word:

And that is why I am happy and can come back from every-  
where bringing good reports:

Bringing fair and noble reports of love from wherever I  
come back—

For I who love for forever: I take love at its word.

## I LIKE YOUR LOVE THE BEST OF ALL

I like your love the best of all:

It does not ask things of me for love's sake,

It does not demand things of me for love's sake,

It does not send me away for love's sake,

It does not call me to itself for love's sake,

It acknowledges no debts incurred for love's sake,

It places no debts upon my heart for love's sake,

It just lets me alone, just lets love alone, for love's sake,

It just loves and lets everything else take care of itself, for  
love's sake:

Yes, I like your love the best of all.

I like your love the best of all:

I can feel comfortable with your love,

I can nestle up to your love like a child that draws life from  
the breast of its mother and cannot speak words,

I can feel at home with your love wherever I happen to be,  
I can stand free of obligation in the presence of your love,  
I can stand exalted in faith in the absence of your love,  
I can go to bed at night knowing that your love is good for  
the next day,

I can take ship and sail to another world knowing that your  
love is good for that other world.

Is it not beautiful to belong to a love that does not make  
claims for itself?

Is it not beautiful to not belong to any love but to live the  
life of love away from the life of ownership?

Is it not beautiful to belong to a love that does not belong  
to you?

Yes, I like your love the best of all.

I like your love the best of all:

It does not sue for favors or coquet for attentions,

It takes what love gives when love need not bestow,

It finds love rich enough in possessing love,

It refuses to beg for love or to steal love or to take love  
from the duty of love,

It knows that the desert may be sterile but that deserted  
love can never be sterile,

It knows that love births love in prophetic inheritances,

It gives and takes without sanction, it is fair to love with-  
out law,

It does not cry an anathema upon the love that goes,

It does not fall down and worship the love that comes,

It does not time love by a clock or weigh love in a scale,

It understands that the lover is not necessary to love but  
that love alone is necessary to love:

Yes, I like your love the best of all.

I like your love the best of all:

It never calls me for its pleasure, it never petulantly sends  
me away:

It is like the universe: do what I may I could not get out-  
side of the universe:

It is like the sun: it gives me life and asks for no receipt,  
It is like immortality: it gives me time and never presents  
a bill,

It is like so many things that are big enough to satisfy the  
thirst of the long enchained spirit:

It is like, Oh, your love is so much like itself—so much  
like love,

In whatever sorrow or joy of the day is so much like itself  
—so much like love,

In whatever success or failure of ambition is so much like  
itself—so much like love,

In whatever crime and jealousy and apostasy is so much like  
itself—so much like love:

It is like, Oh, your love is so much like itself—so much  
like love,

So much—so much—so much like itself: now there is no  
more any doubt about it:

I like your love the best of all.

## I'M JUST TALKING ALL THE TIME ABOUT LOVE

I'm just talking all the time about love:

I try sometimes to talk of other things but I come back to  
love:

To my simple love for men and women, to my love for you,  
to my love for life:

Not caring at all what may be said of me because of it,  
coming back to love:

From whatever excursion into other fields, where other motives prevail, coming back to love:

Something in my heart driving me: something in you impelling me: something: something:

The casual day not satisfying me: the casual ambitions and rewards:

The being thought a lot of not satisfying me: the fame: the noise of popular approval:

Rather shrinking from that: rather preferring to pass around seeing but remaining unseen:

Putting in my word for love wherever I can: even when it seems out of place or unwelcome:

Just saying love everywhere and anyhow so that all may hear: saying love:

Lowering my voice in the noise so I may be heard in the silences:

Raising my voice in the silences so I may be heard in the noise:

But saying the same thing wherever: saying the same thing: saying love, just love:

Making people mad: appearing at the wrong time: saying love, love, whether they listen or are deaf:

All I write, do, dream, look for, being love: all I work for being love:

Just love: just love: just love.

They ask me: What is this message you bring with such a show of purpose and joy?

What can I say? I say: Love: and I say: Love: that's all I can say:

And they look at each other and they look at me and they smile: I know what they mean:

And then the priest asks: Why dont you bring religion? you bring only love?

And then the statesman asks: Why dont you bring laws? you  
bring only love?

And then the singer asks: Why dont you bring us harmonies?  
you bring only love?

And then the poet asks: Why dont you bring us songs? you  
bring only love?

And then they all ask: Why dont you bring something else?  
you bring only love?

And they gather about me: they jeer me: they are like an  
angry mob:

Why dont I bring them trade and power and conquest?  
Why dont I? I bring only love:

Why dont I bring them houses and ease and incomes and  
luxuries? Why dont I? I bring only love:

Why should I bring heaven along with me to interfere with  
the earth? Why shouldn't I let the earth alone?

Why should I stand in the way of the masters and the lead-  
ers and the elect with my senseless call?

What can I say? I say: Love: and I say: Love: that's all I  
can say:

And there they stand, the best citizens, interposing their  
indignant denial:

Love? oh! love would be in place for somewhere else but  
not for here:

Love? oh! love would be in time for some other year but  
not for today:

And so I am laughed at and hurried out of sight for fear  
some of the guileless children might see me and be  
deceived:

And so I am gagged and bound and put into prison for fear  
some of the dreamers might hear me and be misled:

I, who can bring only love: I, who bring just love: I, who  
have left everything else behind me and brought just  
love:

I, who, being asked: what do you bring the need of the world? can only say: just love.

Just love: I bring just love: I talk of nothing else: nothing:  
And you joke about it: you smoke your cigars over me and  
drink your wines:

But it seems to me that no one has ever brought anything  
else that the world finally cared for but just love:

It seems to me that Jesus brought just love, though you  
hung him for it, to be sure:

It seems to me that Socrates brought just love, though you  
made him poison himself for it, to be sure:

It seems to me that all your saints and singers in all time  
brought you just love, though you sacrificed most of  
them for it, to be sure:

It seems to me that every man you think worth while way  
back and all things you think worth while brought just  
love, though you were at first in a great fury about it,  
to be sure:

So it is not surprising that you feel sore on me and make it  
hard for me to endure life:

You look up at the walls of your houses and your galleries  
of art and everywhere see the faces of those who  
brought just love, to be sure:

But you do not learn from that: you go on rejecting the  
lovers just the same: maiming, hating, killing the  
lovers:

You meet me with the old antipathy: I bring just love:  
love, you say, is just what you dont want:

As if anything in the universe was for anything but just  
love: as if the trees or the seas were for anything but  
just love:

As if anything in human life, the feeding, the labor of men,  
was for anything but just love in the end: just love:

As if anyone could think of anything anywhere in any time  
that was for anything but just love:  
As if your children born out of you or you born out of your  
mother, O woman, was for anything but just love:  
As if even blindness and cruelty and wrong was finally for  
anything but just love:  
As if it could be for anything but just love and be anything  
at all: as if it could, O my brothers:  
As if if it was for anything but just love the whole business  
would not go to pieces:  
As if if it was for anything but just love it could have  
started at all, or anyone or you or I would ever have  
emerged from the mysteries into life at all:  
As if anything could have gone on or could go on for a  
minute without just love.

I'm just talking all the time about love:  
And maybe I'm nearer the meanings of things than anyone  
who talks about anything else:  
And maybe your laugh at me is out of place: maybe I should  
be the one to laugh:  
And maybe some day you will put my portrait upon your  
walls and speak well of it after I am dead:  
I who go about among you just talking all the time about  
love.

### ALL WAYS LEAD TO MY HEART

All ways lead to my heart:  
Out of confusions and rebellions, out of venoms and revolts,  
lead to my heart:  
Though they come in the darkness in acts of crime, lead to  
my heart:

Though they are wayward and would prefer to go somewhere else, somehow lead to my heart:

By some mysterious impetus back of what they will to do or not to do, lead to my heart:

All things and all people, clean or corrupt, divine or devilish, lead to my heart:

Sometimes eager, sometimes dreaming of me and of the voyage, lead to my heart:

Haters and lovers, the wronged and the wrongdoers, winners and losers, lead to my heart:

Lead to my heart: come chanting praises or venting curses: lead to my heart:

Those who understand and those who do not understand, the philosopher and the fool, lead to my heart:

Lead to my heart humbling it: lead to my heart making it proud:

Lead to my heart, opening its last door, provoking it to the last hospitality:

Lead to my heart: all ways: ways of question and ways of answer: lead to my heart:

Oh! lead to my heart: shaking the last arrogant superiority off its throne.

You girl of the street—where are you going?

The world condemns you: makes you what you are—then condemns you:

But you: you don't condemn yourself: therefore you are not condemned: there is still a way out:

Yes, there is still a way out: a true way out of a false relation: and you will take it:

I know you will take it—for the true way is the way to me: the way to my heart.

You girl whom I love, whom I meet and make most of—you whom the others make least of:

You girl of the street, you girl of my heart—where are you going?

You are going the way of your regrets: that is the way to me:

You are going the ways of your pain and tears: they are the ways to me:

You may slip down but you cant slip away from me: I will be at the bottom to break your fall.

You girl of the street, you girl of my farthest love: hear what I tell you: take my word for it: I am not deceiving you:

All ways lead to my heart: even the puzzled shambled ways of unbridled desire lead to my heart.

Where are you going? you are going somewhere: do you ask yourself where you are going?

You are going where I go—you are going nowhere else: there is no other place:

We either go to the same place together or we go nowhere at all.

You girl of the street, you from whom those who use you shrink in scorn:

You from whom I dont shrink, whom I dont scorn, though I dont mean to use you:

You girl of the street, you are going somewhere: yes: and I will tell you where you are going:

You are going straight to me: in shame or praise whichever—you are going straight to me:

You have no choice—you cant go the way of disaster and death: there is no such way:

No: you girl of the street—you, loved most of my much love: you will go the way of renewal and life: that is the only way there is:

You: you girl of the street: you will go the way the rest go or no one will go anywhere:

To leave you behind in the gutter would be to leave the whole scheme behind in the gutter—gods, men and worlds:

But you will not be left behind: you: you will go the way to me: all ways lead to my heart.

And do you think, you girl of the street, that because I single you out and specify you I mean to insult you?

No, it's not that: I mean to glorify you: I mean to show that you who most die for us must most live for us in the end.

I might have selected any one not you—any other of the children of men and women—and tallied the lesson in him, in her: any other:

But I chose you—I thought to lift you out of the crowd and identify the others through you:

Through you, dear girl of the street, whose disgrace is our disgrace no less:

Through you, dear girl of the street, who carry the soul widest and deepest towards the revelation it must acknowledge:

Through you, dear girl of the street, my sister, my comrade, my lover, whose unsoiled kiss wipes away the ignominy of the world.

I would feel sorry for myself if all ways did not lead to my heart:

I would feel sorry—it would seem to me as if I had mournfully failed if I stood aloof any where from any one or any thing:

If I was detached, an atom apart, having aspirations and affections secluded, I would be like a man dead:

For the living live everywhere and live all over—in body and spirit live:

For the living love everywhere and love all over—in body  
and spirit love:

And so I am inevitably ahead of you at the end of whatever  
journey waiting for you with open arms:

Even if you come wrong, even if you come defiled, even if  
you come the worse off for human wear—waiting for  
you with open arms.

I want you to know it, I want you to bank on it: that you  
can do nothing to separate yourself from my love:  
nothing:

I want you to understand that whoever gets tired of waiting  
I never get tired—that I remain patiently smiling upon  
all postponements:

The ways are all always open—the doors are taken down:  
the ways all lead to me:

I gather all your villainies together: you bring them to me:  
all your mistakes, all your vices:

I gather all that you bring together and throw it away—and  
I keep you:

O darlings, contrary as you may have been—O darlings,  
jealous, viperous as you have been—I keep you!

The horrors that you trail along with you—the filth, the  
corruption, the despair: I take all that and throw it  
away—and I keep you:

You, plotters and murderers: you, thieves and liars and glut-  
tons: I keep you:

I throw your fraud away: I throw your barbarisms and appe-  
tites away: I keep you.

I do not argue about you: all ways lead to my heart: you  
come: I take and keep you and refuse to give you up:

I have uses for you—the final divine uses for you: uses of  
joy and delight: uses of dreams:

The world has robbed you: you have robbed yourself: now  
you come to me: take what belongs to you:

And what does belong to you? I belong to you: and all the life and love that any one else has—that belongs to you:

Take it: all ways lead to my heart; you ask why you should come? I only say: come!

All ways lead to my heart: here in my heart life shall be paid off with love:

All the sorrows, all the errors, all the tragedies, shall be paid off with love:

Tonight, here, now, any minute, to all, in full, without stint, without qualm:

Through ten thousand ways men and women and children pouring themselves to me: uplifting their helpless hands: plead for their pay!

No matter which way they turn their faces they turn towards me: all ways lead to my heart:

No matter how much they may be in doubt, that much they go towards me: all doubts lead to my heart:

And if I was to close out one single way leading to my heart all the other ways would be impassable:

And so they all come to me: the hurt and those who hurt them, the victims and those who harm them: all ways lead to my heart:

And the base and the magnanimous, the tainted and the pure, here in my heart at last together, reclaim, restore, their shaken faith: in me reclaim, restore:

All ways lead to my heart.

## I DO NOT FEEL GRATEFUL

I do not feel grateful when you are good to me—

I do not get down on my knees and say obsequious things to you:

Nothing inside me tells me to do it and I feel that nothing  
inside you tells you to ask it:

For if anything I give you or anything you give me reduces  
the equality of our love, if your gift or my gift casts a  
shadow,

Then love flies: then love can no longer breathe in the  
close air:

Which makes me sure, O dear one, as between us that our  
love would resent definition and excuse,

Which makes me sure that your being decent with me or  
my being decent with you could have no returns—

That love exacts no fealty, that love refuses a receipt: that  
love loves and lets love go:

That being grateful would be as if we looked for profit in  
the give and take of our sacreddest passion.

And now you know why I do not feel grateful when you  
are good to me.

## WE WERE JUST BROTHERS

Are you so sure ? are you so sure ?

When you sentence your comrade to hate rather than to love—are you  
so sure ?

When you sentence your comrade to death rather than to life—are you  
so sure ?

Are you so sure ? are you so sure ?

Everybody leads you to the great man,  
But when you get near greatness you find it is much like everything  
else.

When you weigh greatness in a scale it comes still to a man—that is all,  
When you put that which is small in a scale that too is a man and no  
less.

Greatness is commonest in the everyday paths.

When the rat ran to his hole you did not say it was great,  
But when the sun dropt below the horizon west that you called great.

After all the great of the earth had passed and passed again while every-  
body saw and hurrahed,

Then came the greatest of the earth and passed and passed again  
unseen and unsaluted:

Will you always be blind? Will you always be deaf and dumb?

## WE WERE JUST BROTHERS

We were just brothers—that was all:

Just two men who loved each other and never gave an account of our love,

Just workers in the world whose work was the sorrow and the joy of each other in days of failure and days of success.

I used to ask my brother why he loved me and he said he did not know,

And then he would ask me why I loved him and I too said I did not know:

And so we went about with each other happy in our sweet secret,

Went about with each other not being too curious regarding the mystery of our dear partnership.

I never used to feel mean in the presence of my brother: He always seemed to fill me with the sense of grace and nobility.

I never was made to feel small before the measure of my brother:

He always seemed to quote me in as big figures as his own.

The roots of my brother and the roots of me met somewhere in the ground below,

The soul of my brother and the soul of me met somewhere in the immortal heavens above:

I did not seem to mind his sins and he did not seem to worry when I offended:

We went every hour hand in hand and did not question the way—

The night was black: we did not question the night:

The storms threatened: we did not question the storms:

We did not question the ugliness of the day or the beauty  
of the day,

We did not question the blessings that came or the blessings  
that were withheld:

We went every minute hand in hand as brothers may go  
who find brotherhood the full answer to all the doubts  
and all the assurances of the soul.

I never felt as though I could wake up any morning and find  
my brother gone,

Or as if they could ever bear my brother away and bury him  
in a grave,

Or as if he might be led off somewhere by a superior love,  
Or as if I could lose him anyhow by any act of his own or  
any act of others,

Or as if in the very worst that could happen to me he was  
not always and forever the very best that could happen  
to me.

My brother was my brother—that was the least and the  
most I could say:

The tree was a tree—that was the least and the most I could  
say about the tree:

The song was the song—that was the least and the most I  
could say about the song:

And so with our darling loves—they were just our darling  
loves and that was the least and the most I could say  
about our loves.

If I undertook to say more or less I could only say goodbye  
and withdraw and shut the door of brotherhood behind  
me.

I was very fond of my brother and he was very fond of me  
but we did not tell each other so—we did not make  
too much of that:

We liked to be around with each other—that seemed to be  
about all there was to it.

The philosopher came to us and said: Explain this to me  
in a theory:  
The mathematician came to us and said: Explain this to me  
in figures:  
The poet came to us and said: Explain this to me in a  
song:  
The artist came to us and said: Explain this to me in a pic-  
ture:  
Yes—they all came to us and said: Explain this mysterious  
thing in words of our trades.  
We shook our heads: how could we? we could not even  
explain it to ourselves:  
We could just keep the road we had chosen and follow it to  
the end:  
We could just go on being brothers and expanding in broth-  
erhood:  
We were just two men who loved each other and never gave  
an account of our love:  
We were just brothers—that was all.

### O MY DEAD COMRADE

*for W. W.*

O my dead comrade—my great dead!  
I sat by your bedside—it was the close of day—  
I heard the drip of the rain on the roof of the house:  
The light shadowed—departing, departing—  
You also departing, departing—  
You and the light, companions in life, now, too, compan-  
ions in death,  
Retiring to the shadow, carrying elsewhere the benediction  
of your sunbeams.  
I sat by your bedside, I held your hand:

Once you opened your eyes: O look of recognition! O  
look of bestowal!

From you to me then passed the commission of the future,  
From you to me that minute, from your veins to mine,  
Out of the flood of passage, as you slipped away with the  
tide,

From your hand that touched mine, from your soul that  
touched mine, near, O so near—

Filling the heavens with stars—

Entered, shone upon me and out of me, the power of the  
spring, the seed of the rose and the wheat,

As of father to son, as of brother to brother, as of god to  
god!

O my great dead!

You had not gone, you had stayed—in my heart, in my  
veins,

Reaching through me, through others through me, through  
all at last, our brothers,

A hand to the future.

### WHAT HAVE I TO DO WITH LIVES

What have I to do with lives outside of my life?

Why should my fortune concern itself about the fortunes of  
the unlucky?

Why should I be distressed when things go wrong in the  
world as long as things go all right in my own house?

Why should I care who has too little as long as I have  
enough?

I call for life, flush and proud, on my own account, ever,  
ever and forever!

Yet life may be poor and unkept,

For life will not come on my own account,  
For life on my own account is empty and forbidden,  
And all the orderliness of my house is ciphered in the general confusion,  
And nothing can be right with me if anything is wrong with the world,  
For the world goes about declaring my name and I can only repeat its cry in the syllables of justice.

How could you pass me unseen, O brother spirit?  
You travel in disguises, you travel in crime and virtue,  
But we arrive together at the same spot—no one comes in before another.

Could I ever know man if any man was less or other than another me?  
Could I reach to the farthest life or reach to the nearest if far and near mattered in the least?  
Could I ascend to Christ or the masters or descend to the obscure or the slaves if high or low counted in the scale?  
Could I know my own face if yours was alien to me, or anything back of either face?

You believe that your next of kin is the man or woman you love,  
You believe that your next of kin is the man or woman who believes in you or in whom you believe,  
You believe that your next of kin is the good and the true.  
I take the curtain away: I will not allow you longer to be deceived.  
Your next of kin may be the man or woman you hate,  
Your next of kin may be the man or woman you doubt and who doubts you,

Your next of kin may be the infamous and the false:  
For if these are not your next of kin then you are friendless  
and homeless on the crowded earth.

For each of your kinsmen is paying a debt:  
He may be paying a debt in his good or his bad—he is paying a debt:  
And your kinsman's debts are yours: his expiations are for  
your crimes and misdemeanors,  
And if your kinsman is paying debts of evil which are yours  
as well as his and you disown him,  
You are disinheriting your own soul, you are soiling your  
own body, you are traitorous to all your collateral selves,  
Bleeding all life away in starry wastes.

### COME, HE SAID, I LOVE YOU

Come, he said, I love you; I do not know why I love but I  
love;  
Something from you to me, something I feel but do not see,  
Prevails on my older self, lifting me clear of the earth,  
Not severing the dead from the living,  
But making the dead and the living one.

Shall I tell you, O my brother?—shall I offer what today  
you could not take?  
No—no: for the hour, for the day, past this sundown—only  
silence and love:  
Only the hand that reaches, only the hand that takes.

But tomorrow: O the morrow!  
With the first gray and flush on the treetops, on the wings  
of the new day,

I know, O I know,  
You will look into my face, I will look into your face, you  
seeing in me, I seeing in you,  
That which was always promised,  
That which cautiously was long denied,  
That which forever now makes day and night and death and  
life and good and evil  
Laws of the one soul, strains of the one song,  
Softer than softness, stronger than strength,  
Ample for boundless continuations.

## AND WE BURIED HIM

And we buried him with the rest of the dead.  
No word was spoken over his grave which could not have  
been said over any other there:  
And after we had buried him snug in his earthy bed we  
turned away and took him home with us to hearthstone  
our aching future.  
What was it that came from him to us and made salvation  
thenceforth unnecessary?  
What in him that seemed to take Jesus by the hand and  
Buddha and turn chant and rhetoric to the superior  
offices of love?  
The church dissolved, the state was wrecked, only a man  
was left, and that man without a name—  
That man our dear companion: What was it, O brothers  
invulnerable?  
What was it that came without reputation from him and  
displaced without scorn all honored traditions?  
When he died no void was left—he filled all voids:  
The near unseen, the far unknown, the cherished figure  
hanging in the background,

He, the least of men, without rank, born of mothers and  
fathers forgotten,  
Without hate or love, measured our common hope.  
And men were not even curious enough to wonder who he  
was.  
The plainest citizen of your city could have been mistaken  
for him,  
The obscure mechanic, the neglected artist, the foiled  
leader,  
The man who somehow had not written up to himself or  
down to the dirt,  
Yet conspicuous above kings who rule with crowns or  
tyrants elected to serve.  
You have thought it was history's end to produce the con-  
spicuous fine person?  
No: all the cost of experience has been paid to produce this  
great unknown life—  
The life of our dear companion—the life of our dearest  
friend—  
Whose passport yields us heaven at a sign.

## I LOVE TO GO AMONG MY DEAR COM- RADES THE PEOPLE

I love to go among my dear comrades the people,  
Loafing in streets with my spirit alert and approving,  
Not afraid to admit the bad with the good or losing faith  
when evil brags and blasphemes,  
Giving my whole self for the whole self of the crowd,  
Withholding nothing from the free interchange of the hours,  
Liberal with life as the crowd is liberal with life,  
In the sacred stream without question of precedence com-  
mingling.

You, dear comrades—you, the people: the common gang:  
You draw me out—you go to my roots and get your pay:  
I am not ashamed of you or proud of you: you are my comrades: I can say no more.

You halt and you go on—you swear and riot and corrupt:  
You take your fill of all folly and turn it to the uses of love:  
Yet you are not understood—the gloved hand does not understand you:

Yet you are not understood—the cultivé does not understand you:

They think you are ugly and dirty: they doubt you, men and women:

I go with you hand in hand, I do not question the way:  
Their clubs disappear, their libraries disappear—you alone figure in the autumn's grain:

For my love of you goes below and above all explanations of love:

Goes to sacrifice, goes to service, which forever glorify you.

The mad sea tosses—the sea of my comrades:

And we call our hellos to each other from the crests of waves,

And the streets teem with the millions of us no better or worse,

And the houses, the silent houses each side, regard us with their dumb looks,

And we give the great city its life or it has no life—

Yes, give it its justifying meaning or it has no meaning:

Lift it all upon our shoulders to mountainous wonder,

And suffer and die to keep it aloft as a banner signaling the farther dreams.

Dear comrades, dear people, I pass unnoticed among you as I should,

And though you do not know it you all gather about me and  
I gather about you,  
And our tears flow together in one sorrow,  
And our laughs ripple together in one jubilant outcry,  
And food is given for food in the labor of the general arm,  
And when you are sick we are partners ill in one bed,  
And when you die we are mates buried in one coffin:  
Poured one into another as into vessels of mutual measure,  
Not eager to be picked out for special applause,  
You to separate yourself from me or I to separate myself  
from you—  
Only contented to be seized and carried along in the master  
current,  
No one preferred for eminence but the total itself so eminent.  
In the highways of the town, in the seething rush and  
tumble of the night,  
As I stray out from my house and lose myself in the intimacy  
of your flood,  
I the singer am merged in the beautiful song.

I try to say things but they dont get said:  
Only the hints of things get said—and they must suffice:  
And when I try to make love to the people they do not hear—  
They miss my true voice in the babel of betraying voices:  
Yet I do not curse and weep and forswear my cause:  
I know that about my dear comrades which they do not  
know about themselves,  
And though their doors are locked I can get in without  
keys,  
And though they miss my secret they cannot miss my forth-  
reaching love.

The streets are full of people, the people are full of me:

I see the artists help themselves to the treasure of the people  
and they do not know I am watching,  
And they put it into books and pictures and music and call  
it by another name and forget the soil that gave the  
harvest,  
And call the sun by another name and the rain:  
But the people are steadfast—they bequeath the great for-  
tunes,  
And in their faces which I look into this night, in their  
unswerving faces,  
Is the plea and promise of sustenance everlasting, of eternal  
fertility,  
Shining more clearly than the stars in the sky above,  
Auguring the noblest fulfilments of the soul:  
I love to go among my dear comrades the people!

### OUT OF THE CROWD HE CAME

Out of the crowd he came and did his work,  
The simple man sufficient, strong and sweet,  
Taking his place in the mix, not pushing on beyond or lag-  
ging behind,  
Letting who pass him who might, letting who rob him who  
would,  
Out of deep shadows emerging when called,  
Then back again into the beloved shadows contentedly re-  
tiring.  
The simple man, the man you meet every day and every  
where,  
A drop in the stream that passes by your door,  
The anonymous sap of the earthtree announcing fruit,  
Lost in the mingling all, averaged in the human lump,  
Creator creating yet never imprinting his song.

Do you know what it means to be very great?

To be very great is to be very simple.

The simplest man on the earth is the greatest man on the earth:

Greatness shrinks from greatness: it disappears off the trail:

It has work to do and does it according to the work.

The singer has a song to sing and sings it according to his song,

He does not sing it according to your ear or your applause.

The men with dirt on their hands, the despised men,

The men of the common trades who go about their work with no thought of fame,

The men who care for the world in its night and its day and yet are unnamed on the list of saviors,

The men who plant in the spring and gather in the fall and are not mentioned in the reports,

The men you would not seat at your table or invite to meet you in equal places,

These are the men of the crowd who save the crowd from you,

These are the men of the crowd who save the crowd from itself,

These men of powerful unheralded intentions,

Clinching the truce of love.

You have taken your lamp and looked for fame and wished to stand alone,

You have worshiped showcase greatness singing its miser wonders,

But greatness does not come dressed up in the compliments and salaams of the multitude.

Greatness is in the sufficient man, being sufficient for what he may,

The plainest man is great if he is as big as his task,  
The noisiest reputation is contemptible if it fails to fulfil:  
nothing can save it.

I am not afraid of the crowd,  
The crowd will do me no harm—  
The crowd will not destroy me, the crowd makes me what  
I am.

In the sweep of the general purpose I star my personal will.  
The crowd is the infinite treasury upon which all greatness  
must draw,  
The crowd is the infinite treasury upon which all identity  
must draw:  
Even identity, that proudest relic of battletired ages,  
Lost in the hut of the hermit is found in the crowd.

## I WANT TO PAY MY BILL TO YOU

I want to pay my bill to you:  
I dont care who you are, for great or small, I want to pay  
to you:  
That debt of ages, that debt of my own few days, that debt  
of quenchless love:  
I want to pay it to you: to you who are in rags, to you who  
are discredited:  
To you who are lost in the crowd, to you who are not a  
master but a majority:  
I, owing so much, having so little with which to pay what  
I owe:  
I, doing my best to show that I acknowledge you: I, dig-  
ging in the ground for you:  
I come to you not as one of the few but as one of all: not  
as one of the famous but as one of the unknown:

I with my arms empty but my heart full being able to offer  
you nothing but myself:

Offering you nothing but myself but offering you the whole  
of myself: until all is gone offering you all of that: the  
whole of myself:

Paying what I can on account, paying from day to day, bit  
by bit:

Never hoping to catch up with your good will yet struggling  
on with undiminished ardor:

I who can hardly commence to settle with you who have  
never paused in giving:

Taking my fill of the general sunshine: sharing the fund of  
common light:

Turning away from the saviors to you: to you, who plant  
and starve: answering alone to you:

Bad or good as they call you, answering alone to you: dirty  
or clean as they call you: to you, to you:

Out of my vision answering: out of my puzzled senses: an-  
swering alone to you.

You have never presented a bill to me but I have presented  
a bill to myself:

And although you do not tell me what I owe you I tell my-  
self what I owe you:

And although you never act as though I was unfilial yet I  
know you are my father my mother self:

And I swear that I'm going to pay you if it's in me to pay  
you—pay you all for all:

And I know that if I do not pay after trying to pay you will  
not feel sore on me:

And I understand anyhow that you are too big to care one  
way or the other about that:

For the peril is for me in not paying, the peril is not for  
you in not being paid:

The main thing is that we are one affair and cant divide  
ourselves,  
And that what you give so lavishly I have got to give back  
somewhere in as full measure,  
And that you who went without meals for me and died in  
battles for me way off somewhere—  
That this brings you next to today and now and makes me  
contemporary with your time.  
There would be no way to cut loose if I wanted to cut  
loose:  
But I dont want to cut loose: I want you all, you floating  
nameless crowds:  
I pass into the streets: into the stream of your mortal life:  
it is my stream:  
And there is no beautiful or ugly to me there: all is one  
thing above beauty and ugliness:  
And when I see your sad faces I cant help feeling that you  
are sad for me,  
And when I see your maimed bodies I cant help feeling that  
you are hurt for me,  
And when I see your half lives I cant help feeling as if I  
someway had robbed you of the other half,  
And when I see your stunted brains I cant help feeling as if  
I had stood between you and the sunlight:  
Which all goes to show me not that I am any worse than  
anyone else but that I am not any better than anyone  
else,  
And that eating another man's food does not make me  
healthier than he is,  
And that being in another man's house or wearing his  
clothes does not keep me any warmer in winter than  
he is:  
For every eye I look into haunts me: makes me see that I  
have a bill to pay:

And every injustice I see haunts me: makes me see that I  
have a bill to pay:

And although those who are broken and lost slink out of my  
path,

And although those who are damned while I am saved hide  
themselves in alleys and hovels,

I know well enough that I am the one to sneak away and  
hide and confess—

That if I was what I ought to be they could stand proudly  
out in the unshaming day,

That if I was what I ought to be they would know that they  
had paid in full and I was yet to pay:

That if I was what I ought to be they would be what they  
are instead of what they are not.

The girl on the street came up to me: what do I owe you?  
she asked:

Darling, you owe me nothing: I owe you: you have paid  
in full:

And I went to the jails: what did the jail owe me? the jail  
asked:

O you innocent prisoners, you owe me nothing: I owe you:  
you have paid in full:

And I visited the mills and the stores: what did the mills  
and the stores owe me? they asked:

O you crowding creators, you only gods and masters, you  
owe me nothing: I owe you: you have paid in full:  
ages ago you paid in full:

And a tramp asked me on the road for a nickel: thank you  
sir, the tramp said: his gratitude scared me:

O my derelict brother, you owe me nothing: I owe you:  
you have paid in full:

And a loafer came reeling up to me, soaked with rum: what  
did the drunk owe me? he asked:

O my masked god: do you think I cant see through your disguise? you owe me nothing: I owe you: you have paid in full:

And the artist who failed turned his picture against the wall: what did his failure owe me? the artist asked:

O my comrade, your failure owes success nothing: success owes you: you have paid in full:

And that is the way it is: wherever I look I dont see what is owing me but what I owe:

And that is the way it is: I cant think of the good I do people, I keep thinking of the good they do me:

And that is the way it is: I go about everywhere choked: I cant say what is in me to say:

When I look at those who are wretched I cant say what is in me to say:

When I see how they have carried crosses for me, I cant say what is in me to say:

I can only stumble out a few words of entreaty and for the rest be still:

I can only reach out a hand to their hands, the living and the dead, and for the rest be still.

Dears, all of you, all you fools, slaves, criminals, prostitutes, outlaws, failures, drunkards:

Dears, all of you, you who are personally forgotten in the remembered total:

Listen to me: you owe me nothing: I owe you everything: everything I have or can get:

Listen to me: I change skins with you: you now are clean and I am rotten: that is all there is to it:

Listen to me: you have offended: you could not help yourselves: the too strong current swept you down:

Listen to me: you have paid in full: being what you are is pay: is pay in full and more than pay:

Listen to me: but I—I have yet to pay: being what I am I  
have yet to pay: to pay in full and more than pay:  
Listen to me: and so I who was always close to you draw  
closer till no one can again tell us one from the other:  
Listen to me: I pay no bill to the virtuous and the gifted  
and the rich: no: I pay my bill to you: I owe no one  
else:  
Listen, dears: I want to pay my bill to you.

### THERE WAS NOTHING REMARKABLE

There was nothing remarkable about the day,  
The day was like all other days, a simple day among simple  
days,  
The clouds in the sky were beautiful but they were not  
more beautiful than I had seen them often before,  
The river I crossed was the same river whose tides up and  
down were the tides of accustomed courses,  
I looked into the faces of the people I passed on the street—  
The people were the same people I had always known,  
The faces were the same faces that had always reflected the  
despair and faith of my own face:  
I lifted the baby out of the crib and fondled it as I had  
fondled other babies fresh through the gates of birth.  
What was it that filled me full and flowing over with radiant  
joy?  
The old thoughts came back again in the old forms: it was  
not the old thoughts.  
The old emotions returned and blessed me with the ancient  
blessings: it was not the old emotions.  
The woman I loved came to me and touched me with the  
thrilled and thrilling palms of our first avowal of love:  
it was not the woman I loved

Failure and success played the usual parts in my shifting fortune: it was not failure and success.

What was it, do you think, that possessed me with such abundant consolation?

I was visited by some added plenty of life:

Something I cannot even speak of to myself that grew up out of all the past yet was not the past.

I think that if I tried to tell the meaning of this it would disappear:

It is so remote from words that words would only shock its ineffable silences.

I used to stand awed before men and women, they were so great:

I still stand awed before men and women—they are not less great:

But before this, how do I stand? O God I do not know how I stand!

I am translated into the substance of my father self,

I go and come in great joy but I do not know where I go and come:

I say I know at last what life is but when you ask me what life is I say I cannot tell,

I say I am carried away bodily into other spheres but you remind me that my body is here,

I pass you on the street and you nod to me, but I pass you again and you do not know me nor do I know myself.

It is a tremendous mystery to me and must remain a mystery, I am overcome, swept away, lost in the furious stream.

Have you lived and missed the last satisfaction of living?

There was nothing remarkable about the day—

The day came, the day went, quite like other days:

No—there was nothing remarkable about the day:

I guess I see what it was—yes, I see what it was:

There was nothing remarkable about the day,

The day was a duplicate of days gone and of days to be duplicated ever and ever:

This was what it was: there was something remarkable about me:

I say it over a thousand times: there was something remarkable about me.

And you, sisters, brothers, dear to me, O so dear to me—

Is there not also something remarkable about you? remarkable? oh! so very remarkable?

Something that calendars could not include but which you include?

Something that no matter what fails and flies that never fails and flies?

Do you not feel it at times as I feel it at times?

I say to all of you, you are all so dear to me, that there is something very remarkable about you,

That there is nothing very remarkable about the days.

## I CAN BE OF MUCH USE TO YOU, DEAR COMRADES

I can be of much use to you, dear comrades:

Do not turn away: make the most of me.

When the orchard is mellow with fruit do not hesitate to eat the fruit,

When the harvest field is rich with wheat do not let it rot ungathered:

Send your boats out on the seas—let them take the last chance with the storms.

When I come to you loaded and running over with joy, take me, profit by me:

Do not stand on the ceremony of untruth, do not apologize for taking what I bring:

Put me into your life just as if I belonged to you, as I do;  
Take all that you need not like a beggar but like a brother.  
You have every right to take because I have no right to  
withhold:

The day has no right to keep back its sunbeams—they freely  
shine as they please:

The river has no right to nullify its tides—they freely flood  
and freely fall:

The tree has no right to refuse to blossom in season—it  
freely matures and freely yields:

I have no right to hoard my love—it freely gushes out of  
me.

They who try to restrain me do not know what they are  
doing—

They are trying to restrain the seasons but summer follows  
spring forever,

They are trying to restrain the day and the night but no  
matter how black the sundown the dawn comes un-  
stopped:

As well think of making nothing of the earth and the stars  
as make nothing of me.

If you are wise you will list me at a very high figure:

You will not ask the gentlemen and the scholars what I am  
worth—you will ask your heart what I am worth.

You have maybe made good investments—you have turned  
a pretty penny on them:

I offer you a superior title—I stand ready to give you that  
to which all other investments would appear paltry.

What I tender you can never go short:

It dont need to be watched for fear it may be stolen,

It dont need to be clutched with miser caution for fear that  
giving it away will lessen its estate,

It dont need to be hid in a safe from the thief or put out at  
interest which robs the poor,

It dont need to be fought for man against man at the fearful cost of injustice;

No: I offer it to you without a cent and I ask no thanks:

I promise that if you take it I will be the debtor, you will not be the debtor:

I promise never to remind you whatever happens that I have made you a gift—

I promise always to remind myself that you have nobly consented to receive a gift from me:

And what I give you will see is so glorious you will wonder where I got it from—

You will look at it and look at me and wonder where I got it from,

And I will not tell you because I could not and could not tell myself.

Only it is sure that you will never be sorry you took what I held out to you,

Only it is sure that I will never be sorry I poured my treasure unstintedly into your arms.

Standing about in the midst of the crowd filled to the brim with what my brothers and sisters of the crowd most need:

Yes: filled and more than filled with what they most need—filled and more than filled with sorrow for their sorrows:

Why should I be backward in inviting them to help themselves with unhesitating hands?

And why should they be backward in helping themselves and taking all they have a mind to?

O my comrades! it is in me and there is plenty and more than plenty for all:

You can exchange all your crosses for this: all your crosses: all.

I can be of much use to you, dear comrades.

## I JUST GIVE YOU WHAT I'VE GOT

I just give you what I've got, dear comrades:

The little things here and there of no consequence born of my love:

The words of my heart addressing themselves to you: the plain simple words of my loyal faith:

I have nothing else to give, but I give you that wholly, without asking any questions:

Coming to you with joy, visiting you with confidence, yet sending no boisterous couriers ahead to promise you anything:

You, all of you, to whom I belong: you, all of you, who belong to me: the somebodies, the nobodies:

Trembling sometimes at your threshold, wondering whether you'll let me in at all:

Me, with my few stray obscure belongings, knocking with fear at your door:

Bringing to you what the others may not bring: the proud, the decorated: what they may not bring:

Yet knowing quite well that maybe my little gift is not welcome—is too trifling to be taken seriously:

That something, that nothing, out of my slender treasury offering itself to you:

Not on its knees, offering: yet humbly offering: shy about its value: ready to be rejected:

The fruit of the slip I planted as a boy now grown to a man's height:

The fruit of the slip I planted as a boy now grown O God how I hope to a man's worth:

Coming with it to you, in my eyes, in my hands, in my voice, in my soul, coming with it to you:

Submitting it to you: without asking you to take it yet hoping it may answer some need of your struggle:

To you, my comrades: to you: from way off, from the shadows, unknown, to you, to you.

I just go on saying over the same thing, dear comrades:  
I have no more than the one thing to say, and that thing is love:

And I say that tirelessly to you so that you hear it wherever you are and whatever you are doing:

I am not versatile, I am not great, I have no standing in the world:

I stay on the ground: I mix up with the crowd: I address you in the plainest way I know:

Keep saying my one word, keep dreaming my one dream: though laughed at, seeing nothing else to do:

Well aware that you resent me: catching you give each other significant discrediting looks when I appear—

When you see me coming run away from me: when you hear me speaking stop your ears:

I understand you: I bring you only the one affair: you are tired of hearing me spell it out:

But I cant get away from it: it haunts me: it fills me with you: fills, overflows me:

It haunts what I tell you of and what I put my hands to and the ground I tread on:

Just love: the love of my heart for you: the love of my heart for the joys I want you to have:

Just love: the love of my heart for you: the love of my heart for the justice I want you to have:

The foolish innocent hunger to be of use to you: the shame-faced thirst to be of use to you:

The resolution to come back eternally with what I have to offer: to take no no as final:

Not sure I am worth while, not sure coming back is worth while, but coming back without fail:

I, without credentials, introduced by no ambassador, suing  
in your haughty court.

You dont know me? I do not wonder: I dont know myself:  
I am at a loss about myself:

You ask: who are you? and I shake my head: I look at you  
and say nothing:

I come to you but I could not tell why: I have something  
for you but I could not tell what:

Out of me some flower will blossom. out of my seedthrow  
some harvest will come:

That I am sure of but that is all I am sure of: there is more  
to tell but I cant tell it:

I feel that I am sent to you but I dont know what sent me  
or what I am sent for:

I say the books did not send me: no—not the noblest books:  
something more than books:

I say the powers did not send me: no—not the universities  
nor the rulers nor the singers: something more and  
more:

I say money and property did not send me: they least of  
all: no—for they are murderously dumb: something  
more and more:

I say that only the love of the people sent me: there is  
nothing more than the love of the people:

And that is the cause why I loaf around among you stam-  
mering out my message:

And that is the cause why I have not repeated it with any  
ornament and brag added but have passed it to you just  
as I received it:

And that is the cause why the masters will tell you I only  
speak a slave jargon and must be interpreted:

As if love needed to be interpreted if you gave love half a  
chance to live.

Now I have said over again what I have said countless times  
before,  
And I dont know how it seems to you but to me it seems as  
if I was saying it for the first time:  
For saying love over never seems like saying love too much:  
you always listen for it again:  
I cant begin to count up the loves I have scattered across  
the earth and the loves the earth has scattered across  
me:  
And I never saw that love did any harm anywhere or was  
complained about O my brothers when you under-  
stood it:  
For that's about all life comes to anyhow—comes to the  
love we can put into it:  
I just give you what I've got, dear comrades.

### AS I LOOK INTO YOUR GRAVE

*for Fritz Scheel*

As I look into your grave,  
As they bury the body of you whom I love,  
As the usual things are being said by those who mourn,  
I find that no death words will come to my lips,  
I find that only life words will come and should come,  
And so I laugh and am exalted at the joyful thought of  
what has happened,  
And those who are gathered with me and who are weeping  
tears of sorrow  
Turn from me wondering and angry and leave me alone  
with you.

Well—why should I not laugh?  
It was a joyful life you led even in the reverse of the battle,

And you helped me to lead a joyful life myself and helped  
countless others,  
And you had a beautiful soul which set numberless beautiful things loose in the world,  
And so you who were a glad giver require to be just as gladly honored:  
Not grieved about in clothes of reproachful black,  
But made merry with in dresses pure white and in dances of carerid feet:  
Not talked of in accents of emasculating regret,  
But told of in the language of virile delight and unstinting exultation.

Dear brother, you were a brave man:  
You were steadfast to a vision which many buy off and many ignore,  
You were not afraid to accept the full challenge, for you were ready to pay the full cost,  
But you finally broke down—like a struck tree were riven to the root,  
Though meantime seas stirred by cruel storms and capes difficult with venom were safely weathered.  
You had saved enough of yourself out of many battles for the supreme battle so victoriously fought,  
And when the noise was stilled and the wreckage was cleared away they found your body—  
Found your body on the spot where the fight had been hottest—  
And they told me that in spite of your wounds your face wore a look of peace.  
That is why I am satisfied, dear brother, as I look into your grave—  
I see through the flooding tears the clear day of my enduring inheritance.

Well, dear brother, you died without a pedestal: you had  
lived on the ground:

You were only a musician—only a man of harmonies and  
a swayer of the baton,

You were only an artist and wore no decorations of martial  
glory,

You were not in uniform and sat in no distinguished chair  
of state,

Yet you stood very high—so high the soldier could not  
reach you,

Yet you stood very high—so high the statesman could not  
reach you:

And you stood on no laws—you stood only on your own  
feet,

And you stood on no dead bodies of men—you stood only  
on your own feet,

And so while the orators tell about other men who are made  
heroes by the number of the enemies they helped to  
die

Let me tell about you who were made a hero by the num-  
ber of the friends you helped to live.

Yes, they assailed heights and were applauded, the men  
who maimed and killed their fellows,

And they died hearing the hurrahs of legislatures and were  
remembered in the reports of rulers,

And histories afterwards said they were the elect of the  
earth.

But you, dear brother—you murdered nobody and you were  
voted no resolutions,

You did not stand in the way of love—you cleared the way  
for love,

For you were one of the builders who always give back to  
life more than they take from life,

So that while the income of the battlefield is on a principal  
of death,  
Your dreamway of sound was a sacrament of birth.  
You sent no one away with less, you sent every one away  
with more,  
You gave your very body, and your body was the world's  
sacred foodstuff,  
You waived your very soul, and the world helped itself and  
grew beautiful in the treasure you released,  
And then dear brother you laid down your baton and closed  
the last score in the playhouse,  
And then dear brother you laid down your body and laid  
down your soul,  
And you who were so tired though so loyal had reached the  
end of your mortal journey.

Now that part of the story is all over with and told,  
And I shall not linger about your tomb saying dead things  
about you who are my living comrade:  
No, dearest brother: I leave you now where you are—your  
body (the few atoms of your body),  
Standing here without one word of death in my heart,  
Standing here flooded with words of life which I must speak  
in your name or be silent,  
Refusing to take the cue of the mourners,  
Taking only the cue of those who are joyful,  
As I look into your grave.

## THIS IS STOCK TAKING DAY

*for William Gable*

This is stock taking day:  
In a world of things this is the first day of the year:

But what have I to do with a world of things?

My world is a world of men: my world is a world of hearts:

When things become men, when things become hearts, then

I'll have something more to do with a world of things.

I say to you, dear brother: very well: take account of stock:

And while you are taking account of stock I will take account of you.

I do not say that it's not worth while to take account of stock:

I say that it's more worth while to take account of men:

In the days and the years when you were building up a center of trade,

In the days of the growing visible witness of your success and power,

Something greater still was going on down your way:

Something infinitely more significant, more beautiful:

What was it, dear brother? can you guess? can you guess?

It was you, dear brother: you were going on:

You were building up—you—the divine human loving simple man:

You were building up majestically out of all the past:

Side by side with your store, back of your store, under your store, you were building up:

You, the foundation of all: you were building up:

And there are many who see the store today who do not see you:

And there are many who do not know that the store's today grew out of your yesterday:

And they do not know as well as you know and I know that the store today is worth no more than a bushel of shavings:

As you know and I know—as certainly I know if you do not know—that you could not be bought with a thousand stores.

So it is, dear brother, that as you take account of stock I take account of you:

And while you are reckoning up goods I am reckoning up a man.

What do I care for your store or another store or any array of wealth?

Nothing—nothing—nothing: it comes to no more than stubble and desert sand:

But you, dear brother: you, the maker of stores: you amount to a lot and everything:

And so when we come to our totals I leave you far behind:

Figure however high you cant figure goods as high as a man:

And so when we come to meanings I leave you way behind:

Dig deep as you choose in goods for a meaning you cant dig to the meaning of a man.

Yes, there is love in the store: you put it there: goods never put it there:

But the love in you leaves the love in the store way behind:

Try as you might you could not get all your love into a store:

The store wouldn't let you, goods wouldn't let you, merchants wouldn't let you:

Struggle as you may you cant struggle altogether free of goods: nobody can:

Today goods are in league against the soul: that is why the soul puts goods second:

But when goods go in league with the soul then goods too may get nearer first and enjoy real honors.

You are taking account of stock: I am taking account of a man:

I too have use for goods but I have more use for a man:

And I dare say, brother, that my job has been harder than yours.

Think what a man is—then try to count him up!

Think of what he leads from, what he leads to—then try to count him up!

Think of his passions, his loves, his bad and good—then try to count him up!

Think of his brain, of his heart, of his appetites—then try to count him up!

Think of his joys and despairs, his victories and defeats—then try to count him up!

Think of his wrestles with himself in the darkness, of his thwarted ideals—then try to count him up!

Think of the things in a man and about a man that don't go right—then try to count him up!

Think of the pure things in a man that are taken for foul—then try to count him up!

I do not refuse to think of the goods in a store: no: and I count them up:

And you know and I know, dear brother, that the things in a store can be counted up:

But the things in a man, the multitude of his parts and plans—they can never be counted up:

Doing the best you can you tell me what the store is worth—

But I, doing the best I can, can't tell what you are worth:

For the worth of a store has its limit and you can count to a limit,

But the worth of a man, the maker of a store, has no limit: it can never be counted by any skill:

So that while I do not give you up I say a man, you, are too much for me: there are no figures for you:

I stand in awe before a man: he mounts so high—the meanest man mounts so high.

So we have taken stock, both of us, dear brother, today:

You have taken stock of the store and you know what it comes to:

I have taken stock of you: my heart's love was in it: but I  
dont know what you come to:  
The store at the best comes to so little a few sentences will  
tell of it:  
But you—you come to so much that no accumulation of  
words would do more than begin to tell of you.  
This is stock taking day.

### SOMEHOW, SOMEHOW, SOMEHOW

*for Stevie at Caritas 1909*

Somehow it seems to me you will take nothing away with  
you that does not belong to you:  
Somehow it seems to me you will leave nothing with me  
that does not belong to me:  
Even the tears, dear comrade—the goodbye tears: they belong  
to you and to me:  
And it is true that as you go I will go with you forever:  
And it is true that as I stay you will stay with me forever:  
For nothing belongs to you or to me or to today in gain or  
loss that does not belong to both of us in treasure for-  
ever:  
Somehow these things seem true to me as you go: somehow  
these things seem true to me as I stay:  
Somehow, somehow, somehow.

### AT WEST HILLS IN OCTOBER

*for D. B. and H. P.*

At West Hills in October:  
Rimmed by the sea to the north, nestled to the bosom of  
the interior hills,

Here, in its ancient post still guarded, an old farmhouse,  
Here, three travelers, curiously lingering, inquiring, with  
affection retrospective.

O day of retreating years! backward, in the hushed room  
assembled—father, mother: the child illustrious just  
born, the vicissitudes and honors of the future unsus-  
pected.

## TENS OF THOUSANDS OF SOLDIERS

*for Fred Long*

Tens of thousands of soldiers in armies march across the  
earth: they are futile, doomed: they are emissaries of  
hate:

A single man lies sick on a bed in a little room in a big  
city: he is resistless, invincible: he is an emissary of  
love.

## THE PEOPLE ARE THE MASTERS OF LIFE

The boat crossed the river day and night—

The usual people crossed, the strangers crossed, I loafed in the crowd:  
Nothing uncommon ever happened, nothing to depress or excite the  
passengers:

Yet I always remembered that there were deckhands who went about  
their jobs without a fuss,

Yet I always remembered that there was an engineer in the engine  
room,

Yet I always remembered that there was a pilot in the pilot house.

Have you the right to sit fed at your table or warmed at your fire  
while your wheat is sowed in starvation and your coal is mined in  
the north wind?

God! You have not stolen a cent from any man you have wronged!  
but think what you have stolen from yourself!

Pour into the yawning hells all your sacrilegious incomes! they but  
measure your departures from yourself.

Face to face, the house of the farm hand, the palace of the money  
king,

(The mails pass up and down the road, never across),  
Though two men were seas apart they would not be farther separated,  
I pass between—I take one hand from each.

Born in the shadow, graded by the law over the gutter's edge,  
Consort of reptile despairs, living to grope not see,  
He raged in blindness, Samson's mate, and wrecked  
The four stanchions of my boasted house.

## THE PEOPLE ARE THE MASTERS OF LIFE

The people are the masters of life: the people, the people!  
So I go about in the streets of cities singing with glad assurance,  
the people, the people!—

Needing no reasons for my great joy beyond the reasons in  
my own heart,

Not asserting myself in dubious words, not being afraid,  
Letting the dissenters and scorners have their unhindered  
way with themselves,

I for my part figuring life out into magnificent totals of love,  
Being satisfied not to shine alone in grandeur somewhere off  
from the crowd,

Mixing up day by day with the common run of men populating  
the towns and farms,

Shining if they shine in their illumination or being lost if  
they are lost in the average measures of worth.

So I go about singing my triumphant song:

The people are the masters of life: the people, the people!  
And though nobody hears my voice I hear it myself,  
And though those hearing my voice don't echo it I echo it  
myself,

And though some are displeased telling me to stop my noise,  
I am pleased with myself and cry out louder than ever:

It gives me such joy, I cry out without intermission so all  
may know what I have to say,

And when the people themselves for whom I sing ridicule  
me I still sing my song for them—

My song, their song, which they not singing make it my  
double duty to proclaim:

The people are the masters of life: the people, the people!

The people are the masters of life: the people, the people!  
So I go round everywhere filling the world with my song,  
Tantalizing the ears of the leaders with my troublesome  
victorious psalm,  
Calling them all off their pedestals to the ground, tumbling  
all their superiorities in a heap,  
Compelling the lords of rule to produce their charts—re-  
fusing any longer to take them for granted:  
Seeing them gather in resentful array shaking their self-  
crowned heads.

Who are the masters of life?

The judge comes: he brings crime: he says: The laws are  
the masters of life!

The statesman comes: he brings the legislature: he says:  
Constitutions are the masters of life!

The painter comes: he brings his pictures: he says: The  
arts are the masters of life!

The chemist comes from his laboratory: his hands are  
stained: he says: The sciences are the masters of life!

The priest comes from the altar: he brings his bible: he  
says: The religions are the masters of life:

And so they all come from everywhere shaking their heads  
handing me their keys—

They all come remembering everything but forgetting the  
people,

They all come trying to drown my voice in the clamor of  
dissuading tongues,

Even the people themselves come explaining themselves  
away, hearing me with alarm—

(O horrible blasphemy: you, the people, the crowd, your-  
selves, shuddering at my challenge!)

Listen, you high and mighty lordlings of things and affairs;

I take all your books and properties and precedents and  
cultures and put them on a pile together,  
And I light them with a simple match into a vast flame,  
And you stand close by with me and see them all go up in  
smoke,  
With lamentations on your lips you see them go up in  
smoke—  
All your masters of life consumed in a common fire almost  
in the twinkling of an eye—  
And then you look at me wondering what now is to come  
to the earth.

I will tell you what is to come to the earth, you lordlings  
of affairs and things:  
The same that has always come to the earth will come to  
the earth again—  
Laws again, maybe, and constitutions, and the pride of  
books:  
All that has just burned up before you so casually will come  
to the earth again and would always come:  
For they have always come out of the people, who are the  
masters of life,  
For they do not come making man but they come made by  
man,  
And will always come, and be destroyed, and come again  
and again—  
All the show of the world will come, all the glory and  
genius of the world will come,  
Not out of themselves, not out of things written in a charter  
or kept in a safe:  
No: not that way: they will come out of the people forever:  
No: not that way: they will whatever their learning and  
riches come out of the people whatever their ignorance  
and poverty forever.

I take the sublimest sentence from the loftiest scripture of  
the race,  
I take the simplest old woman from the poorest alley in the  
metropolis,  
And I put them side by side before your eyes and my eyes  
for us to see,  
And I guess you know and I guess I know without further  
talk who is the master of life.

So I go about singing with glad assurance in the streets of  
cities,  
Needing no reasons for my great joy beyond the reasons in  
my own heart:  
The people are the masters of life: the people, the people!

### THE LEGEND OF THE ROAD

The legend of the road,  
The long trail of courtesy, the line unbroken, as of each  
generation of men greeting the next,  
The marchbeat of ages in a law of the heart treasured and  
divulged,  
This, with the words of it made life—this with the dream  
of it ever unfading:  
*Keep to the right*—so it is given, and *the law directs*.

The law of the heart, the law of the furtherance of justice,  
The law of planets companioning in space the countless  
comrade stars,  
The law of the dream of need, the law of the self's respect,  
The law of the advance of love in the world,  
The law of order without law, the law of the dismissal of  
law:

I have traveled far, it is nowhere withdrawn,  
Men may stultify the law, the law never stultifies them, the  
law is faithful:

The law is the rhythm and the word, the numberer of days.  
Against the law stand tyrant and assassin in fury contending:  
With one hand the law takes the law from the will of the  
state and with the other takes the knife from the hand  
of the destroyer of the state,  
To each giving itself.

No untracked wilderness refuses the heart its heritage in  
this legend:

*Keep to the right:* the farmer rests upon the fence of his farm  
and notes that all who pass observe the law of the road.  
He turns and regards his acred harvest in this law projected.  
In busy streets of cities, on seas unsubdued, in vastness and  
littleness the same purpose propelling.

*Keep to the right:* the law become lore—by it opportunity is  
an open and equal field:

Right and left is the long long line,  
Right and left men greet as they pass,  
Right and left is the signword spoken,  
Left is right as the stream flows on.

## I, A CURIOUS OBSERVER

I, a curious observer, mingled with the throngs of the street,  
becoming as one with many in a restless quest,  
I noting well that in some faces prosperity had fixed its glow  
while in others failure had put out the last flame of the  
torch,  
Saw that all who appeared, whether the alert or the sluggard,  
whether laughers or weepers, came wearing masks,

Saw that all were searching, searching, for something apart  
from the awards of their trade—

Searching for the same thing, searching for keys to a door,  
searching for ways to the open,

The surfeited because of his surfeit, the starved because of  
starvation,

Something I could not put into the signature on a check,  
something as though asking for release from a prison.

The desert was not the desert, the city was the desert,  
On the city's streets men fasted, plenty was there not for  
them to take but for them to suffer for,

There were the idlers with sugar on their lips and bullets  
in their hearts,

There were mothers giving their young the crust of a last  
sorrow,

In the dark abattoir the children of the alleyways were cast  
to the beasts, to devouring laws of trade.

You are an alien in the land of your birth,

When you came all had already been given away,

The lords of the earth had their titles, the few who had  
betrayed the rest,

But you?—You are trespassers wherever you go, you are  
driven with the lash from place to place, in day and  
night never forgiven your vagrancy.

Would you go to the courts of the poor to pick roses?

Nobody but death picks roses in the courts—the roses, the  
children:

He takes the most beautiful, he spares but few—

The court is the sentence of the poor.

And the mothers, O the mothers, who gave the roses to  
the world,

Who shall speak for them the protest that faints on their lips?

The hearse passes along the fetid alley, the flowers are picked with stern hand and tossed into it, the wheels are again started:

We hear the rumble of the wagon as it turns the corner of the street and is gone.

The toy of the child of the court is death:

See, the child learns too well the lesson of its heritage: the child does not forget:

In its heart is revolution!

The orchard is loaded with fruit, the hungry man passes on the road—he does not stop,

Yet there is that in his heart which does stop, stealthily climbs the fence, plucks and eats the fruit—

O, it is that which must be met face to face some day in the open field.

## PROCLAIM FOR ME THE LAW OF REDEMPTION

Proclaim for me the law of redemption:

I do not hold a sword across the common road, I demand that you withdraw your sword:

I do not ask to be thrust forth, I ask only to have leave to go forth—

I may will to remain, doubtless part of me will always remain:

Content being respected and protest being respected,

But my draft must be honored whatever its spendthrift humor,

Giving me right of way.

What does it mean to have right of way?

It means eclipse and sunburst, burial and resurrection,

It means universal fulfilment, man in his heart as the seed  
in the ground,

It means to achieve loyalty through rebellion, peace through  
pain,

It means to sign no single power away, to not accept  
obedience,

It means to give tyrants everywhere notice to quit,

It means to take all titles of nobility from purses and rent  
rolls,

It means that mouths shall go unfed only when no one has  
food, backs go uncovered to the cold only in the general  
nakedness.

On your knees, O humble vagrants, once our masters! on  
your knees!

I declare that the social order is to be superseded by another  
social order:

I know the quality of your folly when you go about the  
streets looking in the dust of noisy oratory for the  
complete state:

I know very well that when the complete state appears it  
will appear because you bring it to others not because  
others bring it to you,

And I know that you will not carry it as a burden upon  
your back but as something unscrolled within.

I declare to all the rest of you that it is your business to put  
aside all other purposes but that purpose which con-  
tributes to my individual success,

Until that is done nothing is done:

You have choked your granaries with grain, you have riches  
to spare, yet your granaries and riches are empty:

You have found that your peck measure had no bottom.

Towards me you will concentrate all power, you are bound  
to see me through,

I, having right of way.

Here, then, my hand: in my will yours to be done, in yours  
mine.

What does it mean to have right of way?

It means to start life ahead of all origins.

Are you unwilling to step aside?

Let us make a compact:

From this day on let us scrupulously keep out of each  
other's road,

You need the whole of your heritage, I need the whole of  
mine,

In autumns of years on harvested fields gathered by free  
hands we will make a common fund of diverse plenty.

You have never trusted me because you have never trusted  
yourself,

Into my life you have read the hesitations, futilities, cow-  
ardices, shames, of your heart,

I have retaliated with even hand, you have carried long the  
dead weight of my errancy,-

In this day's delivery we will be quits with suspicion.

This is not mysterious, it is not a secret on sale for gold,

This is not a promise with which the baffled fancy is forever  
tantalised,

This is a tangible reality inviting the touch of your fingers,  
This is Koran, Bible, Zend, law of vision, law of joy,  
This is your nameless yet unopened unbudded self.

Right of way is mine,  
I assume it without arrogance yet with unfrustrated will,  
I cleave a brutal deliverance in the press of the crowd,  
I must get out, I must have air,  
I ask no coachman favors, I trust my own feet,  
I ask for space: O right of way!

### MY BROTHERS, LISTEN

My brothers, listen, I have something to say to you:  
I have watched you at your work through many days of  
many years,  
I have shared with you your struggles for life and with your  
masters:  
Now I ask you to listen, I want to make a confession.

I want to confess that I have taken my eyes off the kings  
and the great men and fixed them on you:  
I have found in you what I expected to find in them and  
was cheated of,  
I have hunted up reasons and roots and found them always  
in you,  
I have read the great books and asked how they came and  
found they came from you:  
The common man, the general earth, seas and stars, the  
unnamed, the immortally obscure.

You have threaded time and gone without returns,  
You have always been where crises called for you, yet were  
never celebrated in the catalogue of events,

The kings have failed, the great have failed, you have never failed.

I saw that you fed the loom: but who fed you?  
I saw that you fueled the fire: but who fueled you?  
History put up big signs but they never bore your name,  
History set great feasts but you were never invited.

You go to work in the morning with your dinner pail on your arm:  
Does that pail contain your dinner alone and provide only for your simple day?  
Millions of mouths to come hereafter are to be fed by that pail you carry on your arm.

When you go home at night after the day's work the universe goes home with you,  
When you strike against the injustice of the master the sun strikes with you,  
For streams run up and down from you, and the tides derive their ebb and flood from you,  
For the pride of the world and the humility of the world are alike products of the muscles of your arms,  
For the law of the common earth is the law of the common man.

My brother, listen, I have something to say to you:  
I have arrived with the great world here at your workbench worshipping the tools of your trade,  
I have adjourned all other causes to your cause and brought history close by to record your long ignored renown,  
So that when men see you on your way to work mornings or nights or whenever they will take off their hats,  
So that men and women and children will not go to church to see God or to the legislature to see Justice,

But will go to you wherever you are, in your humblest  
employment,  
Hungry, confident, by you eternally confirmed.

### THESE WERE SAVIORS

These were saviors, expiating a law, creators denied crea-  
tion:  
These, the lost miners, crushed in black pits, maimed and  
veiled from the asking day,  
These, called at the mouth of the pit by fond names in  
melting voices,  
Caught in the network of schemes, crunched in the jaws of  
a system.

I had been told that these things were no more,  
I had been told that men were so that they could not be  
happy on the sorrows of others,  
But when I looked into your face I did not see that this  
bloody sacrifice had altered one cartilage,  
And when I saw you take your food I did not see you wince  
as he must who knows he tastes death.

You have fed on the flesh of your fellows,  
You have incarnated man in your crime and drawn man's  
blood in proof of your mercy,  
You have weighed your peace against another's struggle,  
your safety against another's wreck,  
And while you have feasted in life they have feasted in death,  
You in your open air breathing rare aromas of health,  
They in their stifled hole lost in the smoke and the flame,  
You in the eyes of those who love and laugh,  
They in the eyes of those who love and weep.

Do you sleep anywhere at night and not dream yourself to  
the mouth of the pit,  
There into the darkness peering, with hungry eyes gnawed  
by the rack of your guilt,  
Hearing far down somewhere the dulled accusing voices?

You must yet account for this, you masters of slaves:  
The men who cry no more in the darkness will forever cry  
to your heart,  
Till some day you will answer, you will expand to the  
measure of love:  
Then you will leave your meals uneaten,  
You will go out and around bravely confessing your degradation,  
In the end resolved that no food shall pass your lips again  
Till all are fed, till men have ceased to eat the bodies of  
their brothers.

### THE NEW LEADERS

The new leaders are not trumpeted heroes of swell and  
strut,  
They do not come, the general on horseback, the robed  
priest, the tinsel rhymer, the print monger,  
They take their places unobserved, they serve without in-  
structing, their unuttered commands are fulfilled.

Men hear the loud voice, yet do not obey it:  
They do not hear the whispered word, yet they obey it:  
In the surging mass they discover the meanest to be the  
leader uttering the divinest words:  
The noisy orators are dismissed, the flatterers are cast back  
in the ranks;

He only is heard whose rebuke is an ascendant note.

We have too long postponed ourselves and acknowledged  
others,

Now we accept ourselves, we warn the man who rejects  
himself:

The obstruction to me was myself: I am now shaken free of  
the old drag,

I elect myself to a throne which has no subjects.

Hail to the silent new leader tenanting unseen the temple  
which is my heart,

Hail to the entering hosts whose standards express a suc-  
cessful revolt,

Hail to you, to myself, to leaders of men desiring to be left  
in the crowd.

## COME, O YOU PINCHED STARVED OUT- CASTS

Come, O you pinched starved outcasts, you who are victims,  
Come, O children, you who have never flowered—you  
whose hair was gray in your cradles,

For you, in your interest, to your entrance to life,  
I speak, I raise my imperious voice.

I do not hate winners or losers,

I would have causes winners and losers, men and women  
and children never,

I would make my victory your joy and your defeat no man's  
sorrow,

I would gather your treasures into this empty household,

I would pour this poverty into your cup and let you know  
its bitter draught,

I would fix a meeting point to which all interests would  
hasten and where love would flower,  
I would pull no structure down but erect all upon stately  
models, each equal to its needs,  
I would not offer equality or make men by yardsticks or  
peck measures,  
I would leave to the rose its offices and to the thorn its  
offices and to all life free air and journeyed ways with-  
out toll.  
Dare you go your roughshod way making your natural part-  
ners your roadstones?  
Who is suppliant? your slave enslaved or you who enslave?  
O counterfeit masquerade! O mask long endured torn  
from your hideous formulas!

### DO YOU THINK THAT YOU

Do you think that you who looking upon your neighbor  
cannot see Christ may better see Christ looking back  
over centuries of time?  
Your Christs you each day kill and your Christs each day  
are resurrected:  
The chant towards the past, the prayer up to heaven, the  
shudder down to hell,  
The spires of churches babeled into clouds and confusion  
perpetuated among sects,  
The resonant outcries of refugees and death's clangors when  
armies meet,  
The gestures of priestly hands and the blind arbitrament of  
laws that make courts of justice impossible:  
With these against you O Christs you will survive still to  
the last day:  
Not with crowns of thorns ostentatiously flourished,

Not with the crosses of saviors or with the disputes of  
disciples,  
Not in text books or in frescoed temples or in palaces of  
mighty brigands,  
But with people you need not go beyond your curb to find,  
Whose struggle for release from thralldom is that of the seed  
underground eager for spring:  
For these all old Christs have abdicated.

WHEN I WENT TO THE BIG CITY TO  
MEET MY LITTLE BROTHER

*for Eugene Debs*

When I went to the big city to meet my little brother,  
Wondering how I would find him, a drop in so great an  
ocean,  
My heart filled with concern lest we might pass each other  
unseen,  
Then it was that I discovered the terrible poverty of the  
rich city,  
And discovered the unbounded riches of my poor brother:  
And then it was the city that was small and mean and hard  
to find,  
And then it was my brother who was big and generous and  
easy to see,  
For the city could answer questions but could not answer  
the main question,  
While my brother who could not answer questions could  
answer the main question,  
For the main question is not the question of property but of  
souls,  
For the main question is not the question of how much  
fame you have but of how much justice you contain,

And the city asked the question of love could only answer  
with hate,  
But my brother asked the question of love answered with  
love again over and over.

I see him now, the single man confronting the million men,  
And I see him now, his forefinger raised, calling upon the  
million for reasons,  
And I see him now waiting, waiting, with gentle assuaging  
eyes, silent, so silent,  
And I see that the million are unable to give the divine reasons:  
For the questioner, my brother, standing there, is asking  
for reasons:  
Not the reasons of goods, not the reasons of ambition and  
reputation:  
Not these reasons: he knows all about these reasons but  
these reasons do not satisfy him:  
He stands there asking for reasons of equity—asking for  
reasons of right:  
Asking for no reasons of enemies or owners—asking only  
for reasons of brothers:  
And the proud city is humbled, lost for the one vital reason  
in the thousand reasons,  
And the august city is shaken to its roots before this simple  
accuser,  
And that which seemed built upon eternal foundations of  
might rocks to its fall.

It was no accident that brought the outcasts and the victims  
to my brother:  
They came in their hunger and thirst knowing he would  
not turn them away.  
They would not knock at the doors of the contented and  
the comfortable,

They did not go to the storehouses looking for charity,  
begging the dole of alms—

They went straight to him invoking his measureless good  
will.

They figured well: look at him as he stands there: he is  
their defiant spokesman:

He refuses nobody: he has room enough for all: they crowd  
him full.

Stand aside, you starving cities, you adverse populations, for  
your master comes:

(My brother, master of the bad: my brother, servant of the  
good):

He will feed you, cities, so that you may lift yourselves out  
of death:

He will overthrow you who league against him: he is the  
evangel of the light:

Sunbeams are his swordblades: before them falsehoods perish.

Stand aside, you scholars, lying in your learning—he speaks  
words not familiar in your well dressed jargon:

Though you call him by dreaded names, though you reject  
him, laughing at his message,

The crowd draws near, sees his face—the vulgar crowd that  
you scorn needs no introduction:

It takes him up—it puts him on its shoulders—it proclaims  
him its voice!

Stand aside, listen: (what do I hear?): he is citing you for  
contempt—

You have disinherited your innocent children and he is  
calling you to account.

There is a fierce fire spread over the nations: my brother is  
the answer to the fire:

There is a wrathful wind blowing across the seas: my  
brother is the answer to the wind:

There is a black despair settling upon the peoples: my brother is the answer to the despair:

There is the clank of slave chains growing clearer and clearer in our ears: my brother is the answer to the chains:

He comes in the fulness of evil times and knocks the cup from your hand.

I thought I would not know my little brother in the big city,  
But I found I hardly knew the little city in my big brother:  
I would remember nothing about the big city if I did not remember my little brother,

For I learned that my little brother was big enough to contain ten thousand big cities with room to spare  
When I went to the big city to meet my little brother.

## I HEAR THE LAUGH OF THE UNFED CHILDREN

I hear the laugh of the unfed children:

The children of rich cities so poor and of fertile farms so sterile—

The children who laugh in the face of hunger and laugh in the face of despair:

It comes to me at mealtime when I am happy about myself and there seems to be nothing to mend in the perfect world:

The laugh of the children bitterer than a wail—the laugh of the children more wretched than grief.

Why do you laugh, my children? Why dont you cry? It would not hurt me near so much!

I hear it day and night, up or in bed, moving round or standing still:

It is borne to me out of the bottommost deeps of distress to  
the topmost pinnacle of my dreams—

The gorged laugh of starvation, the victorious laugh of the  
lost, the homesped laugh of the outcast.

I hear your laugh, dear children: I do not mistake it: I am  
wild with it:

And I know that your laugh so filled with tears is the laugh  
of innocents who do not know.

O divine children! you are choked and suffocated and dying  
and dont know why:

But I know why: and I will tell you why and I will tell  
all why:

I will go to the upstarts who have drawn prizes, who satis-  
fiedly sleep, and tell them why,

And I will arouse the whole earth to an irresistible resent-  
ment.

Now I go with your laugh in my ears:

I go into the main paths among the chosen and the proud:

I go repeating your laugh—passing it on sure that no one  
will refuse to hear:

Wherever the great men and women live and work, there I  
go:

For the great men and women must be the first to hear  
(must they not be the first?):

Wherever genius lives and works there I go repeating your  
laugh bitterer than a cry:

Wherever the arts flourish and science shines and masters  
rule, there I go:

Whether in the parlors or the statehouses or the galleries,  
there I go:

Not making your laugh worse or better—not accenting its  
downcast note—the laugh more sorrowful than a wail:

Taking it for granted that the eyes and ears of the great and their hearts will answer your accusation with instant shame.

God! what is this they tell me?

The world is too busy: the world has no time to hear:

The world is too busy: the world has no time to love:

The world is too busy: the world has no time to be just.

O you million blasphemies in one blasphemy: is it this I hear?

That the world is too busy?—that the world sends me back with empty hands?

Listen, O my brothers: you will understand if you listen:

You will hear the laugh of the children bitterer than a cry and then you will hear something else:

Yes, something else bitterer even than the laugh of my unfed children:

Yes, something else more fearful to reckon with than the pain of my unfed children who laugh while their hearts break:

Listen, O my brothers: you will hear and you will understand.

The lawyer hears nothing: Leave me to my brief, says the lawyer:

The naturalist hears nothing: Leave me to my bugs, says the naturalist:

The poet hears nothing: Leave me to my rhymes, says the poet:

The musician hears nothing: Leave me to my songs, says the musician:

The President hears nothing: Leave me to my big stick, says the President:

And so though I repeat the laugh of my children bitterer  
than a wail they do not hear:

None of the leaders of men hear the laugh of men: not one  
hears:

None of the autocrats of culture hear the laugh of the un-  
lettered: not one hears:

I go everywhere: I am everywhere doubted, everywhere re-  
jected, everywhere ignored:

Leave us to our ambition, they all say: leave them to their  
death, they all say:

The scholar in the cloister blows dust off the books: does  
he hear?

What is it? he asks: and he says he hears nothing: do I?

And the priest dodging religion round his pulpit: does he  
hear?

What is it? he asks: and he says he hears nothing: do I?

With the air full of sound all being deaf and full of sight  
all being blind.

My children: I guess the best people do not hear your worst  
laugh:

I guess the old apologists of old systems and the old inter-  
preters of old saviors hear no new cries:

They can hear a cry a thousand years ago brought down by  
echoes of echoes of scripture:

They can do that, my children: all of them can do that: all  
of them:

But they hear nothing when you cry on their doorstep in  
the frozen night.

Do not give up, my children: they do not hear you: but I  
hear you:

I do not think your cries are farther off than the haunting  
cries of the long since dead:

The cry of the living is the only cry of the dead I can hear:

I take the living in my arms: I welcome the living to more  
life:

I hear your laugh O my unfed children!

### THE BREAD LINE TRAILS ITS CLOUDED WAY INTO MY SUNNY HEART

The bread line trails its clouded way into my sunny heart:  
Off the street in the cold midnight finds its way to me:  
Leaves the great rows of houses behind, leaves the noise of  
the city behind,

Comes to me—in desire, in belief, in brave reaction from  
fear, comes to me:

The vast long procession of the unfed comes to me for sus-  
tenance—drags its doubtful feet to my open doors:

The cortege of countless thousands, young men and old,  
adrift, hurt, ready to give up, comes to me, seeing my  
hands on the wheel:

The blood-stained stream pouring its threatening flood across  
the earth, comes to me:

Like a living question mark comes to me: like a wild un-  
loosed force divine demonic comes to me asking pay:

I hear its fearful cry: “Look at us, emaciated, in rags: we  
have carried your cross: where is our pay?”

Brothers, I ask that, too: Where is your pay?

Your pay is not in the crust doled out to you in the dead of  
the night:

No: God knows that is not your pay: that is no part of the  
pay:

Your pay can only be given to you in justice in the quick  
of noontime:

Much belongs to you: much: riches untold belong to you:

You have endured for us all—you have accepted dishonor for us all:

Now it's time for you to quit: now it's time for you to demand a reckoning:

I hear your mutterings: I know what they mean: they are not overtures of peace.

This world that sends some of its saviors to scaffolds sends others of its saviors to the bread line: they all look for their pay:

And oh, this world sends some of its girls to the street: they too endure for the rest: they too will be looking for their pay:

And the children lashed into the factories and the stores by a system: they too will be looking for their pay: they too:

And the dead, the starved and the murdered, your father maybe and my father or some others (who knows who?), will come back from their graves: they too will look for their pay.

I peer into their faces: they all come to me: they all ask the same question: "We have carried your cross: where is our pay?"

I know your pay is postponed, O my brothers, but you will get it, cent for cent:

I know that no pay will suffice that does not pay in service and equality:

I know that you suffer while you wait and die while you suffer: but you will get your pay: it can be put off no longer:

I know that being good to you is not pay: I know that being square with you is the only pay:

I know that while you are hungry for bread bread does not feed you—does not pay you:

For I know that there is something you are hungrier for than bread and that you will finally taste its appeasing fruit.

Come to me: yes, all of you—come: take me at my word: They give you bread: God bless the bread: eat: then come to me:

I, too, will give you something, but what I give is rarer sweeter than bread:

I will give you a brother: I will feed you from harvests off brotherfields:

I will not send you away with a crust (O divine crust, too!): I will send you away with faith:

You will not take cold dry crumbs out of my retreating hand and choke over them on the frozen benches in the park:

What I send you away with will rebuild your fires: your torch, near put out, will flame up again:

This is the last bread line: it files solemnly into my heart: it wonders what my password can be:

I feed it once for all: my food will last: you who are fed with it are fed for good:

I send it forth gorged not with crusts but with rebellion:

I do not promise it charity—I promise it love.

I always haunt the bread line (it always so haunts me): last night I was there again: Broadway was ghastly cruel, dim, silent:

The winds blew chill from the northwest: the storm was extra rough: a cold rain fell:

Yes: there was no mistake about it: these were my brothers waiting waiting for a meager penny handed out to them in the dark:

It was all so like looking into a black pit where there was no hope:

It was all so like being in the maelstrom yourself gazed at  
by someone who wondered but did not love:  
But I, O my brothers: while I wondered I also loved:  
And so I went on alone by myself awhile to let it soak well  
in:  
And so somehow though matters looked pretty dense I could  
see a bright way out for us all:  
And that's why the worst does not look hopeless to me:  
that's why, O my brothers: that's why:  
The bread line trails its clouded way into my sunny heart.

## THE PRIEST HAS HIS TEMPLE, I HAVE MY STORE

*for William Gable*

The priest has his temple, I have my store, said the merchant:  
I call all the world to my store: here is what the world  
wants: the world's heart, the world's soul:  
Love may be found here, worship may be found here: I sell  
only that which is righteous before the spirit.  
I do not run my store for profit—I run it for love, I run it  
for service:  
Yes: giving the buyers all I have for all they have: paying  
out each way all of life for all of life:  
Making little of what I get, making everything of what I  
give—  
Asking here the questions of the soul and answering them  
right,  
Testing here the value of salvation and disposing of it for  
what it is worth.  
I am only a storekeeper?—you are only a priest? Well,  
what of that?

You open your bible, I open my ledger: maybe my report is  
as good as yours:

Maybe I keep my store cleaner than you keep your church—  
maybe—maybe:

Look carefully to your church: sweep it out every day several  
times: dont let the dust gather on your religion.

I will make my store so noble you will have to move sharp  
to outbid me with the people:

I will talk such divine stuff for every day you will have to  
do wonders for your Sunday to hold its own:

I will not say things against you: I do not need to: you are  
saying so many of them yourself in your silences:

I will not argue with the people to turn the tide towards  
my doors:

I will build my store so near the people's need the stream  
will normally flow my way,

So that the people when they say religion will not think of  
the church but of the store,

So that the people when the children are born or the old  
folks pass away will rock the cradle and lay out the  
dead in the store:

The store, the natural assembly place of the people—the  
people once the customers who have become the  
brotherhood:

The inspired store, the depot of plenty, responding without  
stint to the cries of those who have fallen behind:

The store, the impartial mediator, the treasury of reward,  
the granary of foods for hungers of the seen and the  
unseen.

You try life out in the temple, I in the store: God knows  
which is best:

The store is as proud an opportunity as the temple: the  
church may profane its opportunity, the store may  
make its opportunity holy.

What can be more right in heaven and earth than treating people on the square?

Sometimes I think it is not goods I sell at all—the things we eat and wear:

Sometimes I think it is love—just love: that everything that goes out is love and that every cent that comes back is just more love.

I say that selling goods may be just as significant as preaching sermons.

They call the church sacred and the store secular: but that depends: I don't go much on epithets:

The store may sell honest goods, the church may preach dishonest sermons:

I say I am tired of having my store invited to your temple—Now I turn about, now I invite your temple to make itself at home in my store:

Let the love of man for man make itself at home here:

The old watchman who patrols the building all night may be better satisfied with himself than the sexton.

If God thrown out of the churches is welcomed in my store why should a cushion in a front pew be worth as much as a board on my back step?

I do not see why a desk in my store may not be as devoutly dedicated as an altar in a church:

I do not see why the savor of my soap counter may not be as sweet to God as your incense, O priest!

The temple is not a temple anyway: only what I do with it makes it a temple:

And the same with my store: my store is not a store anyway: only what I do with it can make it a store:

And if the temple is turned into a stall in the market its pompous traditions will not save it,

And if the store is turned into a temple of revelation its humble traditions will not damn it,

For that only is close to God which the spirit puts there,  
temple or store.

The priest has his temple, I have my store, said the merchant.

## I TOO AM DRIVEN TO THE STREET

I too am driven to the street:

Law and order have issued their fulmin against me:

I have tried to stay in the house of comfort, to sleep in my  
bed of ease,

But something not outside of me, something inside of me,  
says: This will not do.

In night and day I am adrift, I miss the reasons for loss and  
reward:

In the crowd of servers and served I cannot serve or be  
served,

In the contention of masters and slaves I cannot command  
and I cannot obey,

In the cities of palaces and tenements I cannot forgive myself  
my legacy and I cannot accept alms,

In the bankruptcy of heaven and hell I do not want to be  
saved and I am not willing to be damned:

So I cannot stand it any longer: I am without ground for  
my feet or sky for my soul:

I say good bye: I depart: I close the door gently behind  
me:

I say good bye: I offer my bond to the street.

I am driven to you O street for my sustenance:

In rooms my life was in danger—I had to break out, to get  
away, anywhere, nowhere:

In the church my religion was in danger—I had to run from it, to blasphemy, to anything:

In the law my humanity was in danger—I had to declare my divorce from the vows of courts:

In the bed of 'licensed' virtue my love was in danger—I had to tear myself free: O God! I had to save my love!

My inspiration was in danger in books: I stopped the presses: though there should be no more books I had to save my inspiration:

Everywhere crowded the dangers: the superior throngs pressed, choked me—threatened my destruction: I had to jeer, insult them:

The cabals of trades and arts mocked my prayers: the common labor of the hands was in danger: it was the last stroke:

I endured the perils as long as I could: I held back the floods, I submitted to the fetters:

Then the fury of resentment broke loose: I burst my bonds: the escaping rushing waters covered and nourished the earth.

You girl of the street—I am here, I have come to you:

Take me to your self, make of me the fellow of your primitive passions,

Yet be careful what you do with me—I come to you the last from all the rest:

Now you will treat me gently, you will treat me according to my dream—

You will lift me high where my faith has seen you transfigured.

I have come to you anticipating your boundless love—for your love I have given up everything else:

I rush into your arms, I nestle in your embraces, without fear, asking no pledges:

You will welcome me—draw me ecstatically to yourself—  
awaken from your sleep with me by your side:

I consign myself to you, I confer my inheritance upon you:  
I have sinned so much against you, darling girl (with equal  
innocence we offended):

I come to you now with reverent petitions on my lips.

I look into the eyes of my brothers on the streets—they all  
seem to know me.

Here are my true mates, the Christs answering my hunger  
and thirst:

I find my lost heart in the streets—the streets are the way  
of life.

I belong to the crowd: the crowd fills me with its strength  
and ardor—

I belong to the crowd: the crowd does not hold off—takes  
me at my word:

I belong to the crowd—I pass current in the crowd for  
genuine and square:

I am reborn in the crowd—I who died in myself am resur-  
rected in everybody else:

And Christ—the dear Christ—my soul's Christ, my body's  
Christ:

The Christ killed in churches, in laws, in halls of fame,  
and buried deep, O so infamously deep, in the mire:

He is reborn in the crowd, on the street, in obscure places,  
and is laureled and beatified:

The dear Christ, my body's Christ, my soul's Christ, mur-  
dered in the letter of institutions:

The dear Christ, my body's Christ, my soul's Christ, re-  
stored in the spirit of the street.

Take me, O fonder streets: make me over to your uses:  
absolve me from my traditions!

Take me, O clamoring streets: transmute my closet treasons  
into common loyalties!

I come to you penniless: I come to you with my property  
off my back:

I come to you free: I come to you with arts and sciences  
and ambitions off my back:

I do not come to you on my knees: I come standing up: I  
take my place without asking leave or giving thanks: I  
come standing up:

Take me, fill me with wanton presences: pass me current  
as modest coin in the barter of the affections:

I am yours: I throw myself upon your mercy: take me:  
count me in your assets.

I have tried the easy way: it was too hard:

Now I will try the hard way: I guess it will be easier:

I have tried not to love because I could not love that which  
deserved love:

I have tried not to think because I could only think that  
which accused my thought.

What is there for me to do but to say good bye and leave?  
What is there for me to do?

What can I do but fly from death and go where I find life?

I see no other course: good bye dear accustomed companions  
and places!

I see no other course: good bye dear virtues and conformi-  
ties!

I go—I go: the streets are gay for me: they pour out their  
hordes in acclaim:

I go—I go: I hear my name called in a thousand tongues:  
a thousand cities contend for the prodigal:

I go—I go to my beloved: my heart went long ago: I follow  
my heart:

I too am driven to the street.

## KEEP TO THE ROAD, DEAR CHILDREN

Keep to the road, dear children, my brothers, my sisters:  
It's hard to press on but it's harder to stop: steady! steady!  
my loved ones!

Keep to the road: do not turn back: no matter what happens,  
do not turn back:

There's poverty ahead and starvation ahead and battle ahead  
and death ahead: I refuse to see nothing:

Then there's something more ahead: there's truth ahead:  
Do you hear?—truth—divine unspeakable truth.

I promise you no award: I hang no fruit on the trees for  
you:

I expect you to sustain yourselves as you go—to drink sufficient  
draughts of joy out of your own hearts.

This is no play pilgrimage, dear ones, my march comrades:  
this is done in peril of gunshot:

Here are adverse seas and nights and cold winds and bitter  
hates made into one vast total to baffle you:

You face the clamorous world: the world: all the world is  
against you contesting your passage with fierce gestures  
and curses:

Do not think you can come to terms with the world—there  
is no appeal from the straight road: keep to the road!

You have challenged the masters of the people and they are  
everywhere out to meet you:

The lords god of money, the lords god of trade, the lords  
god of the land, are out to meet you:

Do not falter: there is sorrow by the way but gladness at  
the end:

Do not shrink: you can afford to take blows you who are so  
ready to give love:

Nothing can dissuade us now, dear ones: nothing: our eyes  
are fixed on the signal fires beyond.

Keep to the road, my children:

Whatever your business says or your art says—whatever your kinsmen say—keep to the road!

Whatever yesterday says to you or today or power or office whatever they say, keep to the road!

I can hear your mothers pleading with you—O God! your comrade wives, they too pleading:

I can hear your fathers pleading with you—O God! your comrade husbands, they too so pleading:

And the tender ties of homes appealed to, and books, and comforts:

You must resist all, dear children: you must not yield: come: take your place by my side:

Say your good byes, cry your farewells back, but come on with me:

Soon you will be beyond all exhortation—beyond all sounds of home and the past:

Soon you will hear only your own soul strengthening soothing you, making up for what you have lost—

Your own soul, pouring into you abundant light: your own soul, recognizing and saluting you.

Keep to the road, my children—keep to the road, my dauntless darlings:

We have passed the sharpest turn of our lifemarch—our feet will soon be unshackled.

You who have resisted your friends ought to be able to resist your enemies:

The hardest fight is over, dear children, my brothers, my sisters:

The hardest fight was the love fight—the fight when those you love appealed against your love:

The hardest fight was the joy fight—the fight when the things you enjoy appealed against your joy:

You came unscarred out of that—came out with all your love and all your joy left:

The sun breaks upon you: do you not feel it tingling in your blood?—the rest of the journey will be by day.

Come children: sing hymns to the mandawn just grown red on the horizon:

Come children: chant reverent greetings to the new order just lifting its head above the edge of the earth:

Come children: summon the ever denied youngsters, the estranged boys and girls, from the courts where they sleep:

Come children: tell the world to get up: tell the world the Christ has come:

Come children: arouse the slow world—prove that we are not deceiving it with false good mornings!

Keep to the road, dear children, my brothers, my sisters!

On both sides is danger, on both sides is evil, on both sides are the good things of the earth:

The road alone is safe—on both sides are your friends and your comforts: the soul alone is safe:

Though you turn back now and the world forgives you and your family forgives you and the comforts forgive you:

What does it all amount to—if they all forgive you—if you do not forgive yourself?

Keep to the road, dear children, my brothers, my sisters!

## WHEN YOUR NAME IS CALLED

When your name is called,

When out of the press of the crowd and the noise of the street you hear your name pronounced,

When you sleep at night and your name is called in your  
dreams,  
When you work and play and your name is called from your  
task and your game,  
When the church calls your name, when the state calls  
your name,  
When the happy and unhappy world of average men calls  
your name in a loud voice,  
What then O brother can you answer?

Have you been faithful dear brother?  
I do not ask whether you have been faithful to the laws,  
I do not ask whether you have been faithful to constitutions  
or creeds,  
I do not ask whether you have been faithful to the line of  
life marked out for you by any other,  
I ask whether you have been faithful to yourself,  
I ask whether you have been faithful to that self your self  
which gives its faith to man in the largest service.  
I do not call any roll for you my brother:  
I expect you to call the roll for yourself.  
The best questions and answers of the soul are always to  
itself.

When your name is called dear brother,  
Will you answer to that name with your soul or with your  
estate?  
Will you answer in the poverty of the man who has much  
and keeps nothing?  
Will you answer in the riches of the man who fences him-  
self aloof from his race?  
Will you answer in the accents of the tyrant and the thief?  
Will you receive your name spoken in gladness and send it  
back clothed in rue?

Will you answer to your name that your name is success but  
that the name of your neighbor is failure?

Will you answer to your name by the tongue of a delegate  
or will you answer to your name with your own lips?

Dear brother, I am not here to persuade you or to accuse  
you,

I am here asking a question which you must answer.

I am not here asking a question which you must answer to  
me,

I am here asking a question which you must answer to your-  
self.

It would be nothing to you dear brother to answer this ques-  
tion in a way to satisfy me,

It would be everything to you dear brother to answer this  
question in a way to satisfy yourself.

When your name is called dear brother,

When the wrong of the world calls your name,

When the starved children of the world call your name,

When the wars of the world call your name,

When something in the day lighter than the sun calls your  
name,

When something in the night darker than night's darkness  
calls your name,

When something in the heart more sorrowful than the  
heart's sorrow calls your name,

When something in hope more confident than hope's best  
assurances calls your name,

What then will you answer dear brother?

Will you answer in the answer of your cruelty to your fellows?

Will you answer in the answer of the fat of your overfed  
body?

Will you hear your name called and say: Wait, give me  
time, I have so much booty to bring along?  
Or will you hear your name called and say: I am ready, my  
hands are empty of spoil?  
When your name is called dear brother the hour for parley  
and truce is passed,  
When your name is called you must answer offhand with the  
answer of the spirit.  
Without looking about you to question the faces of others,  
Without listening about you to hear the answers of others,  
You must answer to yourself in the quick of self command  
When your name is called.

## HE WAS OF THE RACE ASCENDANT

*for Henry George: 1897*

He was of the race ascendant incarnating the brooded  
dreams,  
He was a partitioner but used no knife to wound,  
He was beamed and rafted as a house strong in the wind.  
  
I do not count him great by the enemies or friends he has  
made,  
Nor by his failures and successes, nor by his dextrous speech,  
nor by his artful pen,  
But by something underneath all these, more near the aver-  
age heart.  
  
He is dead, he fell with the onward wave of the fight driving  
death up the shore,  
To the last sustained his standard was unclosed to the air:  
Alas! he is vanished—death has withdrawn him from the  
reel and the shout:

But the red banner still flies in the place that it won by his charge: it calls down to me:

*Do not look for me on the ground—I am here in the large spaced skies.*

And so we buried him without pomp but with much love,  
And the dead face that we looked at in the coffin was yet  
benignant with unharvested promise,  
And when they took his brave body from us, they who give  
the worn frame to the unmolested earth,  
We, without voice, happy in our inheritance, in rank once  
more, freed the old song of revolt.

### NOW AS I LOOK

*for William Morris*

Now as I look the long procession of the workers trails before me,  
At its head this bearded god, a stick in his hand, a song of  
liberation upon his lips,  
Marching with him gods not yet awake, waking, throwing  
off ages old lethargies,  
Lights of revived life streaming from him to them and back  
again as the ominous pageant of the dispossessed passes,  
passes, passes.

### THE LEAF IN THE FREE AIR DESPISED THE ROOT UNDER GROUND

The leaf in the free air despised the root under ground,  
The power in the engine scorned the black coal in the pit,  
The sunbeam made merry at the expense of the sun,

The moon in its course in the night sky was jealous of the  
arriving dawn,  
So, too, do you, all you purpled ones, aloof, recreantly  
desert your rooftree.

The patient sluggard stream of the outcast:  
These are people, these are untitled masters, these are un-  
cloyed creators,  
These bend and break even the proud frowning palaces.  
These reach you a rejected palm, these threaten you with  
their own pallor:  
Is all pleasant with you? is your ease wholly won?

Have you not taken home with you, in spite of yourself,  
many unpersuadable faces?  
These are the very veins of your body; deny them and you  
are without life:  
These are the money in your purse, the substance and fat  
of possession,  
These are husbandmen, to night and day bequeathed in  
labor.  
The sweetest fruit tastes bitter upon the palate of undeserv-  
ing.  
So many are lavish of favors and chary of justice,  
Therefore the people must wait, therefore they will toil on  
and on.

Are you troubled as you go into these crowds and observe  
that each man of these men, these men who are your  
slaves, watches the clock hands in their slow sure round?  
These are the people, these are the start and finish of social  
order—  
These are the people, who read in the dial outspread  
Warnings to you, promises to them, of freedom.

## EVERYTHING GOES BACK TO ITS PLACE

Why should you look and listen at the keyhole when the door of the temple is unlocked?

Why should you take of the lords god surreptitiously that which they offer you with an open hand?

The table is spread within, you hear divine voices, your lords god wait till you assume their equal place:

Turn the knob of the door, enter, be at home.

Over the cliff rushed the mad, impatient waters,  
Far in the gorge with strenuous noisy passion flung,  
Then passed in ordered flood and fed the farms.

And all of everything seems so much a part of my life,  
All of the things that I do not understand as well as all of the things  
that I do understand,  
All of the things that I cannot reconcile as well as all of the things that  
I can reconcile,  
All the bitter words of my enemies as well as all the sweet words of  
my friends,  
All that my eyes see and all that my ears hear and all that I neither see  
nor hear,  
All seems to belong to me, all seems to take its place,  
All seems necessary to the symmetry of my body and to the symmetry  
of my soul,  
All seems necessary to complete the record for the audit,  
Not a piece or the piece of a piece absent without peril to all the rest,  
To make my love's account with life perfect and perfect at last,  
To make my love's account with death perfect and perfect at last.

## EVERYTHING GOES BACK TO ITS PLACE

After the fever and wear of the day,  
After gain has made the worst and the best of the body,  
After loss has made the worst and the best of the soul,  
After struggle has made the worst and the best of peace,  
After disorder has made the worst and the best of law,  
After fragments of life everywhere have made the worst and  
the best of the whole of life everywhere,

Then the night comes, and the night's reaffirmation, and  
everything goes back to its place.

Then the master of men goes back to his place and is no  
more a master of men,

Then the slave goes back to his place and is no more a  
slave,

Then woman goes back to her place and is no longer the  
dependant of man,

Then the poor man goes back to his place and is no more  
in want,

Then the rich man goes back to his place and is no more  
fattened with surplus,

Then greatness and fame go back to their places and care  
no more for greatness and fame,

Then the hating worker goes back to his place and loves  
his daily work.

So it is that the round world that had got all kinks and  
angles is round again,

So it is that the love of man that had become hate becomes  
love again,

So it is that the struggle of one man with another ceases  
and every man begins to serve every other man again,

So it is that the hurt world gets out of its own harm's way  
again,  
So it is that the tree that had got uprooted plants itself in  
the ground again,  
So it is that the sea that had overflowed the land slips back  
to its bed again,  
So it is that where life had encroached on death and death  
on life both resume their spheres again:  
So it is, so it is.

My brother, this is beautiful for us to know:  
It is beautiful to know that nothing is finally wrong with  
the world,  
It is beautiful to know that love may be out of place in the  
world but that it always has a place in the world,  
It is beautiful to know that the false things have a true place  
in the world,  
It is beautiful to know that the cruel things have a kind  
place in the world,  
It is beautiful to know there is nothing in the world how-  
ever bad but it has a good place in the world,  
It is beautiful to know that even sorrow has a glad place in  
the world:  
O my brother, it is beautiful to know, it is beautiful to  
know:  
When everything goes back to its place it is beautiful to  
know.

## YOU WHO HAVE SEEN YEARS OF SEASONS

You who have seen years of seasons,  
You who have seen mystery dissolve in mystery and experi-  
ence refuted by experience,

You weeping mothers and fathers who have vainly hurled  
your will against the prevailing will of death,  
You who have visioned a passage way from orb to orb  
through all the abysses of space,  
You who have known that in the harvest was the best seed-  
time,  
You who have seen that nothing is ever lost by the way and  
that nothing seen or unseen is dishonored by disuse,  
You it is I address, you know my voice.

I am bared to the airs,  
In me behold the stript tree,  
The autumn come and gone, its denuding caresses leaving  
no garland or sign of the spring summer fertilities de-  
parted:  
To one who looks I am only reminiscence,  
To one who looks, brother of that other, I am glowing  
prophecy—  
To myself I am both and I am present hidden life:  
I cover myself with ice and snow, I sleep, I wait my waking,  
In my sap the courage to break a way to the spring.

Because there are beginnings and endings, therefore nothing  
begins and nothing ends,  
Because the seed must precede the life that comes from the  
seed, therefore rotation is never interrupted,  
Because worlds come from worlds again, and suns must light  
other suns, and orbits of planets grant other orbits their  
laws, therefore continuity is the seal of the covenant.

No one place delays, nowhere in life or death is the impet-  
uous spirit paced to a still stream, one opportunity but  
opens another, sympathy manifolds itself in countless  
emanations,

The lords god prevalent, the lords god transfusing love,  
In all time beginning nothing, ending nothing.

## IN THE OLD LAND THE CHRIST WAS SENT TO DEATH

In the old land the Christ was sent to death,  
And in old lands and new the Christs have preceded and  
followed each other to the same cross.  
The story is often retold, the count again and again is made.  
But here were thousands of Christs for one Christ,  
Here were Christs in battalions given to save the earth from  
wreck,  
Here were Christs in black and white, Christs in childhood  
and old age, offered as tribute to the shaken globe:  
Christs who stood before menace and took the blow, Christs  
evil and good who shared the single sacrifice,  
Here quickened in one deed to poise the reeling sphere,  
In stranger ways, in an untoward hour, going to crosses like  
any Christ supreme,  
Spending sweet blood as good from lavish veins.  
You have worshiped the old Christs—you have told won-  
derful tales about them,  
But here are Christs round whose ascension tales fully as  
wonderful must be told.  
All has been said about the great Christs: but here are  
Christs little, greater than the greatest.  
And the Christs do not surprise me: they come without  
eclat or call: it seems so natural for them to arise:  
The Christs without degree or exception—the Christs of  
the loom and mine: and babes, Christs also, who  
starve to verify our sins.  
Saint Pierre! a cross nearby my heart!

On your aureoled square twenty thousand bodies are out-  
stretched:

Withdrawn from Judea, withdrawn from everywhere else,  
here the cross resumed its mission:

Here the soul was addressed from the bush and the flame  
once more:

In this strange horror transfixed, the faces of martyrs were  
radiant with benign love:

The men and women withdrawn from their toil to the cross  
—the children from their play:

Dead here that I might live: quickened and transfigured to  
shield the common crowds.

You have hurried to accuse God: I accuse no one:

You have hastened to pardon God: I pardon no one:

Do you think I needed to wait for this event to account for  
god or devil?

Do you think I could regard without fear the sorrows of  
living and then shrink like a craven before the blast of  
death?

Do you think that if I doubted God in this shadowing fire  
I could mix God again in the red of any joy?

All is accursed or nothing is accursed: all is rescued or all  
is lost:

And God is not evil to me in evil who is not evil to me in  
good:

For back of Saint Pierre is all life again: back of Pelee is a  
higher crest than its own:

Behind all fires that consume is a fire that saves.

With faith now final I lift my cup of comforting water to  
the lips of this fevered crater:

For if I doubted this demonstration of God I would lose all  
touch with the universe:

And I see nothing more that means death at the mouth of a  
volcano than at the most placid bedside:

And I am no more willing to concede you cruelty here than  
when hands and eyes meet in love and all is peace:  
For somehow I can feel even in all this murk and in these  
darting fangs of flame and in the light upshot and lost  
and in the suffocating gases,  
The impact of the same presence that smoothes your pain  
away—  
The look of the same eyes that lead your ways of compen-  
sating salvation:  
Here the same, here at the crater's mouth,  
Here with Christ reshruven where riot is made of law,  
The smile of Christ in all the din and black  
In restoring calm unfaltered.

### WHILE I AM WAITING

While I am waiting for the flower why should I doubt the  
seed?  
While I am waiting for you to love me why should I doubt  
your love?  
While I am waiting for the ship to come in why should I  
doubt the ship?  
While I am waiting for the total why should I doubt the  
pieces?  
While I am waiting for tomorrow why should I doubt to-  
day?  
While I am waiting for the sun why should I doubt the  
eclipse?  
While I am waiting to be happy why should I doubt my  
grief?  
While I am waiting for the end why should I doubt the  
chapters?  
The flower is only complete in sterility and the flower,

Love is only complete in love and the denial of love,  
The ship is only complete in the wreck and the safety of  
the ship,  
The globe is only complete in the globe and the emptying  
of space,  
Time is only complete in time and the absence of time,  
The sun is only complete in the sun and the darkness with-  
out the sun,  
Happiness is only complete in happiness and the sorrow  
that happiness encloses,  
The tale is only complete in the printed page and the lines  
unwritten.

I wait for my soul but I do not cavil over my soul,  
I go on forever voyaging satisfied with the terms of the  
voyage,  
The skies are my fastsworn allies and I trust in the pledge  
of the clouds,  
The soil is my quickstrong companion husbanding the seed  
that I drop.  
If I denied the world in its wrong how could I accept the  
world in its right?  
If I dodged the blow of my lover how could I melt to the  
caress?  
If I knew the deep sea for cruel how could I know it for  
kind?  
I mole in the earthiest darkness without extinguishing the  
day,  
I fly to the outermost sunfires without taking leave of the  
night.  
How could I work for my fellows if the stars were not  
working for me?  
I but take the hand reached from the darkness and pass its  
palm on to the next.

I who can believe in the house I live in do not doubt the  
house of houses,  
I who can believe in the flesh of your eager right hand do  
not doubt the hands touching me from the unseen,  
I who can believe words I hear cannot deny the words I do  
not hear,  
I who surrender to voices cannot remain deaf to the voice,  
I who can see you with eyes can see you when eyes cannot  
see,  
The cup is fullest when drained if you drink from the cup  
while you love.

I can wait.

The world has waited long for me, I can wait for the world,  
Justice has waited long for me, I can wait for justice,  
Love has waited long for me, O such love's love of passion,  
and I can wait long for love, O such love's love of  
passion!

I can wait, O beautiful assurance—I can wait,  
Wait while things go wrong until they go right,  
Wait while death seeds life until life seeds death,  
Wait while men weep until men laugh,  
I can wait, I can wait, I can wait,  
And while waiting can love.

### AFTER THE LAST FRIEND IS GONE

After the last friend is gone,  
After the last word of reproach has been said,  
After the last drop of water has dried out of the sea,  
After the last seed has turned to dust in the sterile ground,  
After the judges and the jurors have convicted me and with-  
drawn one by one,

After the advisers and the censors have spoken and hurried  
away,  
After the elect have threatened me with nonelect penalties  
and turned their broadclothed backs,  
After the crowd has threatened me with majorities and gone  
aside to confer,  
After mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers have  
pleaded a parting word of caution and passed beyond  
with the rest,  
When I stand alone in the darkness the shelters and shields  
all down,  
When the world without and within has snuffed all its  
lights and closed its show,  
Then I somehow begin to get acquainted with myself,  
Then I begin to see what I really am and can do,  
Then I see that a false self has all these years been playing  
my part,  
Then I see that the life I lived in the world was not my  
heart's life or my soul's life,  
Then I see that I have been hiding from myself all this  
time.  
I hear the last door shut, I hear the footfalls of the last  
guardian die away,  
I see the last ray of the sun disappear down the corridors,  
I am at last alone, alone with myself,  
As in a desert alone with myself, as in the black night alone  
with myself,  
After the last gifts of the world are taken away.

I had all the world had in the world to give me:  
I had all that friendship had in friendship to give me,  
I had all that property had in property to give me,  
I had all that work had in work to give me,  
I had all that beauty had in beauty to give me,

I had all that pleasure had in pleasure to give me,  
I had all that passion had in passion to give me,  
I had all that worship had in worship to give me:  
I was poured full and run over with all that the world had  
to give me.

Yet I went about my life and had not found a way to live,  
Yet I went about in the midst of property and property was  
not propertiful,  
Yet I went about in the midst of work and work was not  
workful,  
Yet I went about in the midst of beauty and beauty was not  
beautiful,  
Yet I went about in the midst of pleasure and pleasure was  
not pleasurable,  
Yet I went about in the midst of passion and passion was  
not passionate,  
Yet I went about in the midst of worship and worship was  
not worshipful.

Then the quarrel came, then my one life quarreled with my  
other life,  
Then the friends departed, then the properties all departed,  
Then fame departed, then power departed,  
Then the shadow fell, then the grasses disappeared and left  
me on the bleak sands,  
Then life came upon life in the first rapture of naked  
recognition.

I AM NOT AFRAID TO TURN THE CORNER

I am not afraid to turn the corner:  
I know what is round there and am satisfied:

I know that hate is round there and cruelty and that I must  
suffer as well as enjoy,  
But I know that love also is round there, ceaseless love.  
I hear voices: voices that caution me against my loyal jour-  
neys.  
But no matter what are the warnings they post on the un-  
certain road,  
I go my way without a stop, in the full knowledge of love's  
loss and love's gain,  
My way to the end and the beginning again without a stop,  
My soul and my body agreed that neither is to falter or  
retreat.  
If I was afraid to turn the corner I would be afraid to be  
here,  
If I was afraid of what I do not see I would be afraid of  
what I see,  
If I was afraid to put the seed in the ground I would be  
afraid to eat the fruit of the orchard.  
I know that life has all love's surprises to share with me:  
they are countless:  
And I know that the universe is no fool to throw me as a  
spent thing into a void:  
It never occurs to me that I am to be deceived:  
That death could deceive life whatever death does,  
That the imperfect could deceive the perfect whatever im-  
perfection may corrupt,  
That facts could deceive my dreams however hard the stones  
of the street may be.  
I can see no reason why the universe should waste me,  
I can see every reason why the universe should make use of  
me—  
Yes, make the best use of me, immortal use, for all the  
years to come.  
Come with me, dear brother,

Come with your doubts, come with your weaker feet,  
Come with me on this dreaded pilgrimage:  
I tell you all is beautiful round the corner in spite of your  
fears,  
That even the shadows are beautiful and the deaths before  
their time,  
Because love is beautiful and love takes care of all its darling  
children.  
Do you tremble, thinking you may be forgotten in the  
crowd?  
Love forgets no one: above all others, you who need more  
than all others, love will call your name.  
I have counted up all the figures of love and I find I cannot  
be left out,  
And I find that you could not be left out, nor a single person  
be left out,  
And I find that if anyone thinks he can be left out he has  
fooled his own soul,  
For the way and the end are fixed and faultless and cannot  
be escaped,  
And the way and the end are the way and the end of love,  
And no matter how many corners you turn or how sharp the  
corners,  
Love is always there ahead of you waiting for you with  
open arms.  
I do not need to put the universe under bonds to treat me  
with love's good will,  
The universe cannot help itself, it must treat me well and  
best,  
Because the design of all is love's design and cannot be  
evaded,  
And I and you and everyone but come into the general  
bounty wherever we go:  
I am not afraid to turn the corner.

## HE ASKED TO BE LIFTED UP

He asked to be lifted up:

The old man who had bravely carried the burden of his  
years:

He looked beyond to the hills and beyond the hills,

He looked beyond to space and time and beyond space and  
time,

Trusting his body and his soul to supporting hands.

Something unseen takes from you the dead weight of your  
bankruptcy,

You surrender to it the cruel and unendurable tasks,

You feel that it is sufficient to sustain you when you can no  
longer sustain yourself.

What is it that reaches out to me from incomputable dis-  
tances and years?

Under me is the great earth to bear me up,

Under the earth are earths of farther space,

And under all earths a something still invisible more strong  
to uphold than all the drifting orbs.

Could I anyhow fall away from this arm?

I drop down and down and down—it always catches me:

There is no abyss but it is at the bottom,

I commit no crime or sin but it works up from under and  
makes me pure.

Do you believe that the buildings have foundations and that  
you have none?

That virtue has foundations and that vice has none?

There is but one arm—it is around all—it lifts everything:  
do you feel it tenderly steadying you?

But take it away for an instant and all will lapse in a dead  
pool,

The good and bad will lapse, whatever of life will lapse,  
whatever of beauty or hate.

Did you think that sometime the base would be taken from  
under your life?

That the gods would forego their privileges and stray off  
taking care of themselves and forgetting you?

But the arm is always there in its place.

No peril is too sudden for its ceaseless vigil:

When the baby just born dies the arm is there to break its  
death,

When the old man asks to be lifted up the arm is there to  
answer him:

The same arm, sleeplessly loyal, redeeming its promise to  
stay:

Not stopping to ask whether you have earned its immortal  
suffrage.

I feel it now, this minute, serving me,

Raising me with perfect ease as high as the standards of the  
day,

Not lifting me to heaven for desert and dropping me into  
hell for desert,

But holding me only up to myself, to the level it knows I  
live on.

The suicide tired of life jumped right into its keep,

All enemies and friends are succored in the same embrace,

It fails nothing, not any hour I sleep, not any hour I am off  
guard:

It lifts me up—eternally lifts me up.

### WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Where does it come from—this tingle of my flesh for the  
answer of the flesh?

Where does it come from—this ecstasy of my soul for the  
answer of the soul?

It fills me until I run over, it empties me until I run dry,  
and does not explain:

It visits me in sorrow and visits me in gladness and does not  
explain:

It sins through me, its goodness is good through me, and  
yet it does not explain:

To me it does not explain—to me, the asker of questions,  
it does not explain.

I stood irresolutely at the door of explanation with my hand  
on the knob:

I stood there and argued with myself and did not go in—  
no, I turned and went away.

It seemed to me that the door of explanation was the door  
of death—

It seemed to me that if the secret was given out to me I  
would die at once:

I knew then that if I ever found the knot untied I should  
say good bye to the finished worlds:

So I did not go in—I turned away and found my way back  
to the companioning crowd.

I look at myself and I say: What a puzzle I am! And I  
ask myself: Who can unravel me?

Suppose all was told—suppose I exhausted the treasures of  
revelation?

I shuddered and shrank away: I was so eager to be alive and  
so hated to think about life!

The pall of wisdom was upon me and I was unequal to the  
load.

Somehow I feel that the fool alone is perfectly at ease in  
the universe.

The fool alone is at home among things, on whatever stars  
or suns, without license or restraint,

The fool soul finding its fool welcome wherever it goes.

I hear men praying—praying to know all and more than all:  
I, too, pray—pray to know nothing and less than nothing.  
I am sick to death of knowing things and the burden of  
things,

I am well to life of knowing nothing and of my empty  
hands.

The lords god have been very generous to me—they have  
sent me undeniable treasures,

Each day I pass them all back because it is enough for me  
and too much to have nothing.

Let me speak, O lords god, in the language of the first  
silences:

I break loose in song, I am mad with the rhythms of praise:  
I live the life of feasting and starvation without the knowl-  
edge of gladness and sorrow,

I pass among men as a man who can live and not suspect  
the quality or the plenty of life.

They say of me: He knows nothing—he is one of God's  
fools.

I open my first eyes upon the glory of the green earth,  
I gesture with my first arms in the blind exhilaration of the  
animal at play in the field,

I do not try to pronounce the simplest syllables of the  
schools:

They baffle me with their show, they cheat me with their  
substance.

I stand with the trees that know nothing of the alphabet of  
criticism and could not tell me why the seed comes  
before the flower,

I stand with the cloud that floats across the sky and could  
not tell me why the rain falls,

I stand with the dreamers of crazy dreams which give no  
account of themselves,  
I stand with all these, my comrade fools, God's fool among  
God's dear fools,  
With my reason shut, fast shut, explaining nothing,  
With my eyes open, wide open, seeing everything.  
Where does it come from?

### I HAVE TAKEN THE BAD WITH THE GOOD

I have taken the bad with the good and been happy:  
In the irresolution of slow days have taken the bad with the  
good:  
Not waiting to be approved but going about my business  
without a question:  
Being called back a thousand times by those who loved me  
and by those who feared what I was going to:  
Meeting with enemies, often having to fight my way through  
them inch by inch:  
Not always being so dead sure yet always being sure enough  
to go on:  
I and my little enterprise, divine companions, loving each  
other, side by side:  
Through twenty years of toil standing together, keeping no  
account of what it cost—  
Knowing, of course, that it would cost love but being will-  
ing to pay love as long as love lasted:  
Refuting resentments, overcoming despairs, only remember-  
ing the thing that needed to be done and driving fear-  
fully and fearlessly towards it:  
That sacred impossible thing which it became our possible  
task to do—

Going a little farther out of camp, reaching a little more  
beyond the frontiers, taking man a little nearer his own  
design:

That being the appointed result, that being what we gave  
ourselves to do—myself and my comrade:

Not saying now today that we have failed or succeeded,  
only saying that we have tried:

Not saying now today that we have been loyal or disloyal,  
only saying that we have been happy:

O so happy even in the defeats and mists of calamitous  
times: so happy, O so happy!

I did not always know what the world was about but I always  
knew what I was about,

And so often when it looked as though I'd have to quit be-  
cause the world said I should quit, the odds against us  
being too great,

Then somehow it looked more as though I'd have to con-  
tinue because my heart said continue:

For I did not embark without knowing how much of my  
daily substance would have to be given for this price-  
less shadow:

I did not start making light of the journey or supposing I  
was a spoiled darling of fortune:

I saw before I took a step that I was in for a tussle of life  
or death:

And so I planned for patience and prayed for grit and most  
of all filled myself with love:

For I knew that love would take me on without fail after  
all other supports had given out:

For I knew that love would stand by me as long as I stood  
by love:

And so after all, in spite of the laughter of the crowd that  
saw my boat launched and heard my hurrahs—

After all, in spite of the jeers or the silences of those who stood there and saw me set sail—

In spite of all that they said or did not say I was not suspicious of myself—I had no doubt I was steered into the right course:

Knowing from something within me that I was obliged to accept this challenge no matter what consequence it led to—

Whether it led to reward or ruin, whether it led to discovery or oblivion.

Shall I say anything now about the terrors of the voyage?

I do not pretend that I have always been joyful or always been true:

I too have gone way down: has anyone gone down deeper than I have?

I too have gone way up: has anyone gone higher up than I have?

Some days the storms were extra thick and my pulse was extra slow—

Some days I looked above to where the pennant was flying in the contrary winds:

And then I asked questions—then I wondered if the code was worth while or if I was worth while:

Then I was puzzled and ready to drop the thing where it was and confess myself outplayed:

Oh! yes: I too have burned and seared in that hell knowing its fiercest devouring fires:

And I don't understand why I did not surrender right then and there instead of pushing on:

But I pushed on: I stopped wondering and questioning and pushed on:

Taking that which I could not see for granted: taking victory for granted:

In the poverties taking riches for granted, in the unforgiving  
battle taking the forgiving peace for granted:  
Shutting my eyes, confining myself to what was inside me:  
taking my heart and its love for granted:  
Then going on and on and on—in the bitter cold sailing  
into the eclipsing veil:  
Going on and on and on: taking my heart and its love for  
granted.

Well—I have arrived somewhere but I do not know where  
I have arrived,  
And I come to something but I do not know what it is I  
come to,  
And my adventure has not been wasted though I could not  
give you any evidence of its success,  
And my love has not been misplaced: my unshakable love:  
and yet I could not put it into figures in a report,  
And so it may be that I who commenced in such mystery  
remain enshrouded in the mystery with which I com-  
menced,  
And it may be that it would not be best for me to know  
anything or much about my gains or losses:  
So that now, standing before you with my hat off, helpless,  
neither innocent nor guilty—  
So that now I can say no more than that I have done my  
best and served in love:  
I have taken the bad with the good and been happy.

### GOING WITH HEART SO SURE

Going with heart so sure to the edge of the world we know,  
Counting the miles allowed, counting the quota of years,  
Exact to an inch the field, exact to a second the lease,

Surveying the vista without hope, entrusting to the soul only  
its mortal errands,  
Keeping all threatened adventure home in the safe confines,  
Taking no chances with space, taking no liberties with time,  
Settling each bill before nightfall and fearing to borrow on  
next day,  
Knowing nothing of beyonds, conceding no farther bounds,  
Holding impatient pioneers back in inherited lands.  
These were the guardians of youth, these were the censors  
of age,  
Giving to the preface of the certain day the finis of the  
certain night,  
Year after year maintained in the likeness of similar years,  
Not seeing that the amplest horizon but leads to a larger  
circle farther on,  
Always keeping death close upon the heels of birth, forever  
reminding the beginning of the end,  
Giving to the usual paths the preferences of the settled soul.

This was what I was born into and this was what you called  
life,  
This you felt was sure, here the ground was under your feet:  
In the vaguer pastures outside, in the dimming cloudlands  
ahead, you saw nothing but menaces gathered.  
I looked, looked past all looking, looked into the shaded  
wilds,  
I saw life released into the authority of larger life.  
I heard your cries, and as I went on heard that they fell  
behind.  
I had not asked for safety, I had only asked for life,  
In the life you called life I could find safety but I could not  
find life.  
I wandered to the last allotment of earth, accepting its  
measured acres,

I went with the most of men the last allowed foot of space,  
I spent with the most of men the last prescribed minute of  
time,  
Then I said good bye and leapt into the saving void.

I needed room to be safe, I could not be safe in a little  
room: I needed much room:  
I needed time to be safe, I could not be safe in a little time:  
I needed much time:  
I needed danger and disaster and deprivation to be safe, I  
could not be safe in the velvet repose of plenty,  
I could not find safety in the dead pool, I stagnated with  
the pool,  
I could only find safety in the tides of rivers and the currents  
of seas, I was alive with the river and the sea.

I go with any man as far as any man has man to go,  
I go with safety as far as safety has safety to go,  
I go with logic as far as logic has logic to go,  
I go with rules and forms as far as rules and forms have rule  
and form to go,  
I go with virtue as far as virtue has virtue to go,  
I go with love, O love with love, as far as love has love to go,  
I go with all things as far as all things have all to go,  
Then say good bye and stake my fortune on the issue  
abroad,  
Abandoning all charts and anchorages to keep my appoint-  
ment with life,  
Sailing out of sight of safety to be safe,  
Going with step so sure as far as my bondsmen will go,  
Then leaving the bondsmen behind and continuing the  
journey alone,  
Not doubting that life will there find something better than  
ground for my feet to tread,

With sail so sure sailing the unsailed waters,  
With step so sure breaking into the pathless lands:  
Going with heart so sure, with heart so sure.

## I DONT KNOW WHAT GOD IS ABOUT ALL DAY

I dont know what God is about all day,  
I dont know what he does with the sun and the moon when  
    I'm not looking,  
But I guess it's something mighty good for us all and some-  
    thing to last forever.  
I am not let into all the secrets of the world:  
Lots of things happen and I dont know they happen,  
And lots of other things happen and I cant explain them,  
And there are births and deaths that seem queer to me and  
    rack my heart,  
And bad men grow rich and good men grow poor and I dont  
    see the reason for it,  
And there seems to be less affection in the world sometimes  
    than there ought to be and that troubles my soul,  
And some man or woman I have done the most for likes me  
    the least and I am broken up over it,  
And seed planted in good faith often never comes to a crop,  
And the vagrant spring often produces the dutiful abundant  
    harvest,  
And ambition and worship and fortune so many times go by  
    contraries and in spite of our loyal faith,  
So that with these griefs and griefs added to them I am  
    puzzled and stricken—  
I shake my head a bit and wonder what God has been about  
    all day to let so much slip through God's fingers that  
    does not seem to be the work of God.

Yet I guess a good deal goes on that I know little or nothing about,

A good deal that would make much or make all clear,  
So that I do not feel like saying words about God that I would regret.

It's very certain enough goes on back of the seed to explain why the seed fails,

Or behind my brother to show why my brother fails,  
Or behind rewards or lack of rewards to show why the bill of fate is paid or is not paid,

Or behind my daily labor to show why my perverse feet carry me away from my dearest dreams.

Behind all the storms God must be about something,  
Behind all the things that seem to go bad God must be about something that is sure to go good,

Behind all the injustice of the earth God must be about something beneficent for the earth,

Behind all the days that pass crooked God must be about something to pass straight.

Because I do not know what God is about every hour of every day must I conclude God is about some evil?

Is it not easier to see that God must be about some good than to see that God must be about some evil?

I do not deny that I am bothered some by the reticences of God:

Such things throw me off the scent of God—

Such things make me wonder if God is after all doing God's best for us or is leading us into a corral,

And I now and then come to conclusions which are treacherous with despair.

But though I go away from God I invariably come back to God,

And though I find it hard to explain God's ways I find it harder not to explain God's ways,

And though God so often says "wait" when I ask God questions, or says nothing,  
I go the way of my hunger, I go the way of my thirst,  
committed to the necessity of God.  
Dear sisters, dear brothers, I suspect that a great revelation  
will some day before long remake and glorify the common life,  
And I suspect that we will then find what it is God is about  
all day,  
And I suspect that we will find in spite of eclipses and  
wrecks and losses and sicknesses God is about good all  
day and nothing but good,  
And I suspect that we will find that God is about love—all  
day is about love,  
And I suspect that we will find that God who may miss  
being about some things will never miss being about  
love,  
And I suspect that we will find that somehow even in the  
fruit that comes to nothing and the people who come  
to nothing God is about love—  
I suspect that somehow it will all be explained and that it  
will all be about love:  
That's what I suspect, dear comrades, and that's what I  
whisper to you now that we are so close, oh so close,  
together:  
I don't know what God is about all day,  
But I guess it's something mighty good for us all and something  
to last forever.

## I THINK GOD DOES PRETTY WELL

I think God does pretty well:  
We growl like unthankful children about the world,

We go round with our haughty noses in the air scenting defects,  
We challenge the ways of God by the ways of men,  
We condemn God without a hearing and make light of God's troubles,  
We cheapen God to the prices of the market and the codes of schools,  
Yet God keeps right on being God and makes no answer,  
Yet God pushes the tides along and holds the stars to their courses and says nothing,  
Yet God sticks very closely to business day and night without a word,  
Keeping God's accounts square to the last atom of substance and the last pulse of life.

You want to reverse the decisions of God,  
You want to shift the universe a bit to the right or to the left to improve its standing,  
You want to take the pen out of God's hand and sign a few checks with your own name.  
I have sent a lot of advice up to God in my time so I am not feeling proud or superior,  
But I say I don't think it ever did any good either to God or to me,  
And to tell you the truth I would have been afraid and tried to run off if God had taken my advice,  
For I notice I make a pretty mess of disease and of sex and of being honest here on the earth,  
Getting the pros and cons pretty badly tumbled over and damaged,  
And after sweating and swearing as I wrestle with the stubborn soil of the common day,  
I am glad enough to call in God to conclude my chaos with a touch of God's order.

When I look out over the harvest field in the fall I feel that  
God does pretty well,  
And in the winter with winter's snow husbanding the latent  
life of the ground I feel that God does pretty well,  
And when the spring comes eager for reproduction and the  
summer passes the treasured burden along I feel that  
God does pretty well.

The priests get together and remodel the work of God with  
a creed,

The statesmen assemble in legislative halls and amend the  
work of God with a constitution,

And so religion is lost—we must go back to God for  
religion:

And so freedom is lost—we must go back to God for free-  
dom.

I looked at the sunset last night—God seemed to do pretty  
well there:

And then I looked inside myself and saw even more won-  
derful similes of color and form: God seemed to be  
doing pretty well for me.

It is easy to take the work of God to pieces—it will not  
resist you,

But what can you do to put the work of God together again?

I can see the moon and the sun and the tides made different  
but I don't know that I can see them made better:

The tenets of God are in physical law and moral necessity  
and human hate and love.

I have my bother getting God just correct but I have more  
bother toeing the mark with my uncertain feet,

And while I wait I look out upon the cities and the rest of  
the stage and thank God that God does not let go—

Thank God that while I am wondering just where to start  
to make matters over,

God just keeps right on doing things in the old way.

There is something way ahead of virtue and vice,  
There is something way ahead of mercy and cruelty,  
There is something (strange as it may seem) way ahead of  
right and wrong,  
There is something way ahead of ugliness and beauty,  
And if you will look way ahead you will see it,  
And if you see it you will from now on not ask God to  
change places with you,  
And if you see it you will from now on cloud the heavens  
with no more muddy counsel,  
For you will from now on know that in spite of the priests  
religion does pretty well,  
For you will know from now on that in spite of the states-  
men freedom does pretty well,  
For you will know from now on that in spite of advice God  
does pretty well:  
Yes, in spite of your honest sorrows and tragic bewilder-  
ments, does pretty well.  
Do you not see, dear comrade? is the sun up in your world?  
Do not be afraid to look: the light will not hurt you: it is  
full day: look!  
I think God does pretty well!

## I AM SICK WITH THE SICKNESS OF THE WORLD

I am sick with the sickness of the world:  
I have followed the stream up and down and seen the debris  
on the tide,  
And I have heard the cries of the failures as they were swept  
away and lost,  
And I have seen how hollow and useless success was to its  
deceived victims,

And I have tasted the bitter and sweet of fame and found  
the applause of the crowd drowned in its groans,  
And I have watched men go wrong and when asked why  
they should go right have said I could give no reasons  
for virtue,  
And I have confused myself in the darkness of arguments  
and philosophies and given up hunting for the scrip-  
tured truth,  
And I have even turned against love and accused it of over-  
weighing and overmeasuring its collateral,  
And I have given up the radiance of the skies for the slime  
and mud of the swamp,  
And I have called men back from their ideals and set them  
to work hoeing and digging and asking no questions of  
the future,  
And I have sterilized the harvest field with the paling cow-  
ardice of my despair,  
So that the prospect wherever we look is hopeless and offers  
us no compensations:  
The faded dreams repudiated with scorn and sold for junk  
to the buyers of life.

I am the asker of questions:  
I knock at all doors and ask questions of those inside:  
I appear in college halls and question the teachers and stu-  
dents assembled,  
I push into the churches and straight to the pulpit place and  
ask for God:  
(The priests say God is out and I suspect that God is  
oftenest out to the churches):  
I go to trade, into its mad clamor, and drop my questions  
there tumbling the prices to chaos.  
I ask my questions: but incomes do not understand what I  
mean:

Only the soul knows what I mean and assents to my call.  
But the world is sick: the world is in bed: the doctors are  
helpless:

Call me: let me be the world's physician—let me prescribe  
for the sick world.

Yes, dear brother: the world is sick near to death.  
But let me say it: the faint world will revive—the world  
will get well:

The home is sick in the tenement,  
The well fed child is sick in the starveling,  
The judge who sentences is sick in the prisoner who is  
sentenced,

The saints are sick in the sinners,  
The woman beyond pay is sick in the prostitute:  
The world over the masters are sick in the slaves,  
The world over the good every way is sick in the bad,  
The world over the dreams are sick in the facts:  
I see the fearful contest going on around me giving no  
quarter,

All that should be beautiful and well being hideous and sick:  
All everywhere waiting sick until all everywhere may catch  
up and be well:

The drag of the bad on the good delaying the earth—  
The drag of the sick on the well holding the pioneers back:  
The well world waiting sorrowfully for the sick world to  
catch up—

Waiting in darkness and trembling for fear the sick will  
never catch up,  
Knowing that if the sick fail to catch up the journey of the  
well world is wasted.

I am sick with the sickness of the world:  
Keep me, dear world, near your shuddering heart:  
I dont want to go on without you—not a step:

We must go on together—to fruition or death: go on together or not at all:

I see the light that will lead us true: but if you do not see it then I too am blind:

I have feet and courage to bear me up: but if your feet are sore and your courage is gone then I will stay with you where you are:

I will not cut loose, I will not disown my brother pilgrims:

The fate of my brothers is my fate—the victory, the defeat:

The love of my brothers is my love—the pure, the profane:

The life of my brothers is my life—the elation, the distress:

The god of my brothers is my god—the care, the neglect.

So do I stay close to my brother no matter what happens,

Lying now today on his bed of sickness in pain with his pain:

I am sick with the sickness of the world

## I AM WELL WITH THE HEALTH OF THE WORLD

I am well with the health of the world:

I have followed the beaconing lights upstream,

And I have found that all trails pass into deific seas of recuperation,

And I have not avoided any evidence that could be used against my vision,

And I have not made too much of good deeds or figured extravagantly on the future,

And I have not put crowns on saints or sinners perfect or corrupt:

No: I have only let alone that which God has let alone,

And have tried to make out after my own fashion what time and love honestly come to—

Just as I want to know what the sap in the tree comes to,  
Just as I want to know what the light from the sun comes to,  
Just as I want to know what art comes to in human service:  
And so it is that I look forward to conclusions of joy rather  
than of sorrow,

And while not wishing to betray myself with fool dividends  
Have felt that life is a safe investment and need not humble  
itself to its accusers.

The light goes out but I am not afraid of the darkness,  
And gladness goes out but I am not afraid of grief,  
And my friends go out but I am not afraid of being alone,  
And applause goes out but I am not afraid of the popular  
ridicule,

And even affection goes out but I am not afraid of indiffer-  
ence,

And fame goes out but I am not afraid of promiscuity,  
And life itself goes out but I am not afraid of death:

Yes: I stand bared, stripped to the body, stripped to the soul,  
Left for lost on the outstretching pathless desert,  
With the skies frowning above me and the earth rocking  
under my feet,

And the last cry of human salutation echoing itself away in  
vacuums:

Yet, whatever goes out I stay, for whatever purpose stay:  
Whatever goes out I remain, unmistakable, demanding my  
fee:

I, demanding life and fulness of life and being paid cent for  
cent:

I, whatever goes out, staying here where I belong, my foot-  
sole planted on immovable rock.

I do not bother myself with intentions: I take intentions for  
granted:

I do not mind disease: I take cure for granted:

I do not mind poverty: I take riches for granted:

Nor greed, nor cruelty, nor shame, nor corruption, nor  
misjudgment—

No one minds these as little as I do: I take the opposites of  
these for granted:

And so, when you think you are my enemy I do not mind  
your harsh words: I take my friend for granted:

And so, when others are troubled by what they cannot  
explain I do not mind it: I take explanation for granted:

For the seed would be senseless to me if I did not take the  
harvest for granted,

And suffering would be senseless to me if I did not take  
relief for granted,

And wrong would be senseless to me if I did not take right  
for granted,

And man would be senseless to me if I did not take God  
for granted:

I do not mind the dark pits I who take the sunlit peaks for  
granted,

Even when I reach my hand into the night taking the hand  
of my guide for granted,

Even when I reach my soul into the unseen taking the  
parent soul for granted.

I am well with the health of the world:

I stay, dear world, very close to you, day and night, what-  
ever you do:

Gaily we start out, gaily sail, gaily go into port:

For we have whispered the truth to each other: the mists  
are withdrawn: we are wide awake:

The puzzles unravel: the diseases unravel, the injustices  
unravel: despair unravels in exaltation:

I am well with the health of the world.

## YOU KNEW ME WHEN I CAME TO YOU

You knew me when I came to you:

After all the others had turned me down, after the darkness  
had set in:

You knew me: you came along in your simple sweet way  
and said: Hello!

I felt as if somehow I had gone to God and God had said:  
Brother!

It did not seem as if anything else mattered after you said:  
Hello! and after God said: Brother!

I did not look farther: I felt filled full and choked with my  
simple excess:

You did not make any fuss over me: your arms were wide  
open, your heart was wide open: I just slipped in:

First you stood aloof: just a little: just long enough to give  
you time to see through my veiling corruptions and  
griefs to me:

I waited: oh! the agony of it: I waited: what if you too  
had said: I don't know you?

But the smile came out on your face: like a sun came out:  
the assenting invitation: like a sun came out:

Then I knew you knew me: O God! you knew me! your  
arms reached, reached, reached, and included me.

I went to God, footsore and lonely, out of my battles,  
whipped, in dishonor:

O God! don't you know me? my cry went up, up, piercing  
severing the clouds:

And out of the distance, after I waited and trembled and  
was about to slink away, I heard the voice: the voice  
said: Brother!

The soldier came home after the long war:

He was dust stained, his beard was grown and gray, his face  
was haggard and worn:

His cause was the lost cause—lost in the world though not  
lost in his heart:

He came on heavy feet: he rang the bell at the door and  
waited:

The door opened: the mother, the wife, the lover, stood  
there, wondering, half afraid:

The man looked in, looked into her questioning face: she  
gazed and gazed and said nothing:

Then his heart in its agony cried out: his heart in his sob-  
bing voice: O God! dont you know me?

The woman did not need to look again: the light broke:  
she opened her arms: she received and welcomed and  
enclosed him:

The sad sick soldier after the long war, the lost cause, the  
trip afoot for many miles:

She knew him, she grappled him madly to her hungering  
and thirsting body: the lovers were together again at  
last:

And so in the silences silent themselves needing no words  
they drank life from each other: their bodies, their  
souls:

O God! dont you know me? and she knew him: he was not  
turned away: he had no farther to go.

O adored one: you: you, my lover, my comrade, my  
mother, my child:

O God! dont you know me? cant you recognize me through  
my scars?

I have met life and been thrown by life: I have met love  
and been thrown by love:

In the furious give and take of the earth I have sinned and  
fallen and seemed lost for good:

Now I come to you: creep to you on my hands and knees:  
empty, with nothing to bring you:

Now I cry to you out of my broken heart: I have lost all:  
all but my love: I have kept my love:

O God! dont you know me? and I sink in the dirt and  
gloom before you, asking, asking:

And what do you say to me, O adored one? that I am to  
stay or to go on?

And what do you say to me, O adored one? will you lift me  
up or am I to slip farther down and disappear?

O God! dont you know me? O God! dont you know me?  
The tide goes by, the crowds go by, the hours go by: I wait,  
I wait, I wait.

And there you found me, O adored one: by the gate you  
found me, in the storm and cold:

You found me just where they had flung me, rejecting me  
from their assemblage:

And you lifted me up, you took me with you, somewhere,  
I dont know where:

And you gave me yourself: you breathed love into me out of  
your plenteous joy:

And I came around: when I awoke I was nestled in your  
arms: you smiled on me:

My head was on your breast: you had held me close, close,  
till I had been won back to life:

The others had said no: you had said yes: they saw nothing:  
you saw all:

And so you took me: I was yours: and when the others came  
you shrank from them:

You were jealous of this miracle you had done: you pushed  
the intruders away:

What were they to me, to come at dawn with praises after  
you had saved me through the impossible midnight?

And so it was that after you said: Hello! and God said:  
Brother! I did not seem to want anything more:  
Anything more would have overfilled my cup: I was satisfied  
with hello and brother: they gave me great peace:  
You knew me without being told who I was: through the  
obstructing shell knew me:  
You stood there looking at me: O God! dont you know  
me? and the radiant yes broke into your face and spilled  
from your lips:  
And so I was saved: from the long war, saved: from the lost  
cause, saved:  
You knew me when I came to you.

### YOU DONT LET GO OF ME

You dont let go of me: O my dear love, you dont let go:  
Your heart dont let go: when I have felt as if I was slipping  
down, dont let go:  
In the questioning nights, in the questionable days, when I  
reached out for something to hold on to, dont let go:  
You were always there: somehow always there: you, my  
love, without words, in joyous silence:  
So that I have got so I depend on you: feeling that I cant  
fall beyond your providence:  
You have so surely forgiven me: when I deserved to be  
turned away, have welcomed me:  
You have so surely made less instead of more of my sins: so  
surely made more instead of less of my virtues:  
You have so surely overlooked what you could not help but  
see: the blots, the inexcusable shadows: overlooked  
them all:  
You have so surely not weighed me and measured me but  
have so surely just loved me: so surely, so surely:

Which has made it so that I have faced life and its disasters  
without being too much worried whether they went big  
or little:

Knowing that no result could be the worst result as long as  
your love lasted: no result: not the worst:

Seeing that I could not drop too far below for you to reach  
to me and pull me back: though dropping far and far  
below not dropping too far:

You, my savior lover: you, whose heart has said its heart's  
say to me once for all and stood by it:

You, refusing to ask whether I was worth it or not: you,  
refusing to let me go: worth it or not, refusing:

You, you, you, O darling: you, refusing to let me go.

It has seemed that same way with God, O brothers: yes it  
has: that same way:

God dont seem to want to let me go, either: God seems to  
hold on to me the same:

In all my wilful neglect of myself has not neglected me: in  
spite of my delays has waited for me to come:

Something way off in the heavens sent to me way here on  
the earth at the last minute to even up the fates:

Making the life which hardly seemed worth while living  
over again in images of larger import:

Tempting me to my feet once more: encouraging me to a  
new start: firing me with fresh flame:

God, love, delusion, beyond somewhere, within, taking  
command when I dropped the wheel: pulling the ship  
around:

God, making me feel at home: the alien despairs vanishing:  
I giving up but God not giving up:

So often, so often: when I felt there was nothing more to  
do finding the mysterious things mysteriously done for  
me:

Lifted out of myself, out of the pit, to a high place: oh, up,  
eternally up, to where I may hear and see my brothers  
again:

It has seemed that way with God: when I was about to finish  
God only seemed about to begin:

Just as it seemed that way with my dear love—that when I  
was all done with myself she was just commencing  
with me:

Has seemed just that way with God: has seemed just that  
same way with my dear love: that same way: always  
that same way.

When I say God you shake your head and say nothing: you  
do not see:

When I say my dear love you shake your head and say noth-  
ing: you do not see:

And then you say: you must tell us how that is: how God  
is: how your dear love is: we do not see:

And then you say: you must show us how that is: how God  
wont let go: how your dear love wont let go: we do  
not see:

But I cant tell you how it is: I do not know how: I only  
know that it is:

But I cant tell you how God is, how my dear love is: I only  
know that they are:

And I do not need to prove anything that is: I only need to  
prove the things that are not.

I live in God: I do not need to prove that which I live in:  
no: living in it is enough:

I love in my dear love: I do not need to prove that which I  
love in: no: loving in it is enough:

And though your questions puzzle me God does not puzzle  
me and my dear love does not puzzle me;

I feel them as they sustain me: I feel them as they surround me: I feel them and I am satisfied:

I dont think I would be so convinced of God if I had to go looking for God and verifying God:

Or of my dear love: I would not be so convinced of my dear love if I had to go about looking for her and verifying her:

It is not having to turn God and my dear love into a rule that makes God and my dear love infinitely precious and conclusive:

I let you count it all up in figures or deny the figures: you: I am not interested:

If you get anything out of figures all well and good: but I dont think I could ever get God or my dear love out of figures:

When I say God, when I say my dear love, I have said enough: there is no more to be said:

When I say that God wont let go of me, when I say that my dear love wont let go of me, I have said enough: there is no more to be said.

O my dear love: you dont let go of me:

I let go of myself: I give myself up: I slip down, down: oh! where will I stop?

But you will not let go of me: you do not give me up: no matter where I slip to you still hold on to me: you do not give me up:

No matter where death threatens to take me to life still holds on to me:

No matter where hate threatens to take me to love still holds on to me:

Your life, dear love: your life holds on to me: your love, dear love: your love holds on to me:

O my dear love: you dont let go of me.

WHEN MY BOAT PUTS OUT FROM THE  
SHORE

When my boat puts out from the shore,  
When the last word of love and of hate has been said,  
When my account with yesterday is all closed,  
When nothing can be taken off the total of its good and evil,  
Then I can sight my vision unhindered upon the wide open  
western world,  
Then I can for the first time know what I have journeyed  
for in the doubtful years,  
Then I can total the mortal causes in an immortal result.  
I do not know which I love most—the shore I have left or  
the shore I am going to:  
I guess I love both just the same—that if I was ordered to  
choose I could not choose.  
I do not know which is the best part of me—the part I left  
behind or the part I have taken along:  
I guess there is no best part of me—that any one part of me  
is just as important as any other part of me.  
The look back is so sweet, the look ahead is so sweet,  
I hear so many I love calling upon me to return, I hear so  
many I love calling upon me to push on.  
My boat goes on and on, away, away, away, towards,  
towards, towards:  
I walk from bow to stern and back again and regard with  
equal honor the contending shorelines—  
What can I say to my heart which reaches out both ways  
with such contrary desire?  
I do not seem to belong to my receding self or to my dawn-  
ing self but to something else within me:  
I cannot tell what it is but it steadies the keel of the ship  
and makes the voyage certain.  
I sail, I sail, I sail, across the unfathomed waters,

I pass ships everywhere, ships of beauty and hideous ships,  
and I hail them all—

Ships of love and hate I hail, ships of piracy and philanthropy I hail,

Hail all the ships with abounding and unhesitating love:

They all belong to the same shores and the same seas and  
bear towards the same port:

I hail the ships that hail me in return, I hail the ships that  
are silent.

Many are the departures of the soul, many are the arrivals  
of the soul,

Many are there who suffer agonies seeing loved adventurers  
set out,

Many are there who throw curses into the wake of the ship,

Many are there who do not understand—who shake their  
heads and are contented with their usual tasks,

Many are there who expect the ship to go down in the alien  
sea:

But you, oh my soul, you know the truth and firmly assert  
the truth:

You know that the ship could not go down and that there is  
no alien sea.

Up and down, up and down, the deck of my boat I walk,

Up and down, up and down, casting hungry looks back to  
the ancestral haunts,

Up and down, up and down, casting hungry looks forward  
across my new horizon.

My passage is paid for by love—by the oldest love and the  
youngest love.

Oh loved shores—I say to you: Good bye!

Oh loved shores—I say to you: I am here!

I do not feel as if you had wronged me, you, shore that I  
leave: I feel as if my work with you was done—that is  
all.

I do not feel as if you are to do better than the other shore,  
you, shore that I voyage to: I feel as if I had work to  
do with you—that is all.  
So I do not feel as if I could take sides and say yes or no to  
either,  
I do not feel as if I could speak of good or bad or sun or  
shadow,  
I do not feel as if I could love either or hate either try as I  
may to weigh them against each other,  
I do not feel as if I could abandon my old love for any new  
love:  
I look back upon the retreating shores of my self with oh  
such hungry eyes to return,  
I look forward upon the advancing shores of my self with oh  
such hungry eyes to bear fearlessly on:  
I walk, I walk, I look—I cry my hungry farewells, I cry my  
hungry greetings:  
Oh God! which do I prefer? or do I prefer you, God, whose  
shadow is the substance of all?  
My heart is the heart of the past and will always be so,  
My heart is the heart of the future and will always be so,  
When my boat puts out from the shore

### I HAVE SAID YES TO LIFE

I have said yes to life, I take nothing back:  
When the tide has gone against me I have said yes to life,  
In the hour of dismay as well as in the hour of conquest I  
have said yes to life,  
When life has been quoted against virtue and justice I have  
said yes to life,  
Is the battle lost? I still say yes, forever yes, to life.  
I went where evil was freest and did its worst,

I went into the darkest places where joy was rated very low:  
Wherever I went I carried my yes with me—

Carried it with me in my heart, in my face, in my words,  
Carried it with me when I stroked the forehead of the sick  
man,

Carried it with me cooling the fevers of the race,  
Carried it with me tempering the cold out of the north—

My eternal yes—the lifeboat setting out from wrecks.

Whatever was the danger my yes was on the spot immortally  
rescuing those who struggle,

My yes went to the starving as food and drink,

My yes went to the surfeited as purity and abstinence,

My yes went to those who stole as restitution,

My yes went to the poor as plenty and enough.

After beauty is most beautiful my yes is more beautiful still,

After power is most powerful my yes is more powerful still,

After love is most loving my yes is more loving still,

Whatever is best and holiest my yes is better and more holy  
still.

My yes does not go to cruelty and shame to absolve cruelty  
and shame—

My yes goes to cruelty as gentleness and to shame as recu-  
peration.

You have conceded the splendor of the sun in the sky—

I come to you expecting a concession to the superior splen-  
dor of my yes, my yes to life:

My yes is the thing that precedes the seed in the ground  
and follows the harvest,

Before my yes all the players of day and night rehearse their  
parts.

Is my yes to be made no in the fret of the sorrow of the  
world?

Are you to bring me totals of dubious figures and frighten  
my yes to no?

My yes does not look for, it bestows, approval:  
It takes life at life's best and life's worst and remains the  
yes of its firstborn faith,  
It gives itself once for all to life and never takes anything  
back.  
Life does not always seem to say yes to me yet I always say  
yes to life:  
Yes to life when I understand life: yes to life when I do  
not understand life:  
When I go to life or stay with life with my yes life always  
finally answers yes back.  
Are you afraid to say yes to life for yourself?  
Do you stand trembling on the shores afraid to put off upon  
the inviting waters?  
Beyond me is my yes forever carrying me on:  
The yes sailing my ship, the yes with forthreached hands at  
the end of the voyage.  
Do you not see dear brother how dangerous it is to be alone  
with no in the world?  
Do you not see dear brother how safe it is to be alone with  
yes in the world?  
Dear brother I have said yes to life, sternly yes, lovingly yes,  
I have said yes to life, I take nothing back.

## WE ALL SEEM TO BE MOVING TOGETHER

We all seem to be moving together:  
Little and big, clean and corrupt, superior and inferior, we  
all seem to be moving together:  
Something is pushing us on: back of us eras and generations  
of men: pushing us on:  
Try as we may to separate ourselves, to lift up our heads  
with pride, to mask and dodge:

Try as we may we cant cut loose—we may drift from the harbor but we are still on the sea.

It makes me feel so big to feel all my fathers and mothers back of me pushing me ahead:

It makes me feel so little to feel all the girls and boys, my farthest children, dragging me into the illimitable future:

It makes me feel so much like being all together—all together with all of the others:

It makes me feel so much like being all together—all together with all of myself:

It does not make me free: I am not to be free: but it is to make me love: I am to love:

And so I am not unhappy for giving up what I never possessed and getting what I never expected:

For the feel of the ground, the feel of the air we breathe, is the feel of being together:

For the feel of the dreams of my soul and the feel of the fires of my body is the feel of being together:

For having all the earth to myself would be nothing to me if I did not have the people inhabiting the earth:

For being promoted to paradise would be less than nothing to me if I was compelled to receive salvation alone:

We all seem to be moving together: together we have meanings: any other way we have no meanings:

You with me, anyone with anyone, the blackest with the whitest, the robber with his victim:

All, all, moving together towards something big enough and good enough for us all:

Big enough for all the little, good enough for all the bad:

Moving together: not divining why or to what: but sure that the cause is sufficient, sure that the place is worth while.

There we were on the boat in the wide river: all of us  
moving together:

The waters moving with the sky, the stars moving with the  
clouds:

Nothing still, nothing dead or inert, nothing tired or worn  
out:

The mountains as fresh every morning as the day they were  
heaped up out of the first fires:

Everything moving with everything: the earth in space:  
distance itself with time:

Nothing left behind: not a shred or a patch: not a derelict  
or an outlaw:

Worlds within worlds moving, moving: souls within souls  
moving, moving:

Light moving with darkness, the past moving with the  
present:

The dead moving with the living: even the dead: the dead  
not lost, either: moving, moving:

Across the streams and the lands moving: across the heavens  
moving: all with all:

The endless procession, the march of eternities, the pilgrim  
deliverance: moving, moving:

Out of all into all, out of nothing into nothing: moving,  
forever moving:

Not stopping to argue or separate: not waiting for anyone  
or anything to catch up:

Knowing that all is moving together: whether a little be-  
hind or in advance what does it matter?

Knowing that though we fight we move together: or enjoy  
or suffer, move together:

You with me, dear brother: you with me: listen to me as I  
say it: moving together:

Making all the isolations useless: making all cloisters blas-  
phemous:

Moving, moving: all together; all in the same course:  
moving, moving:

Farthest moving with nearest, oldest moving with youngest,  
together, together:

Into the enclosing darkness, into the emancipating light,  
moving, moving, together:

Enemies and friends, saints and sinners, beginnings and  
endings, all moving together:

Without reason yet with the best of reasons, passing, repass-  
ing, in tireless journeys:

Moving, moving, moving: together, together, together.

We all seem to be moving together: what other way is there  
to move?

The whole body and spirit of the globe undergoes a change  
with the simplest word I speak:

I take a single step: all life and death are recast in the ebb  
and flow of my desire:

There is no loss but all lose: there is no gain but all gain:  
we move together:

There is no love, no lack of love, but all love, but all lack  
love, in the current of the common sea:

Something is moving us on: something that includes us all  
—that sweeps us all into its competent span:

Something is moving us on: something that after it has  
passed has left no debris behind:

Something is moving us on: something that takes no ac-  
count of castes—that only takes account of love:

Something is moving us on: all of us, with one intention:  
something finally hospitable:

Something is moving us on; something that after death  
moves on to life once more without stopping:

Something is moving us on: I feel it: its arms embrace me:  
its kiss is on my lips:

Something is moving us on: a personal something: a you or  
a me: keeping me always closest to itself:

Something is moving us on: we all seem to be moving together.

No dream is wasted in the last stretch of the day,  
No soul is lost in the final count of the race:  
The old negations are denied, the guards of life and death are dismissed, the long distrusted stream is left to its course:  
Gods who disown men are self crucified: no hell is so black as the court that condemns men to it.  
Service is self benediction, rule is self restraint.







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